

CHILD WITNESSES OF WIFE ASSAULT:  
WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

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KAREN PATRICIA R. TUCK









**CHILD WITNESSES OF WIFE ASSAULT:  
WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?**

*by*

*©Karen Patricia R. Tuck, B.S.W., B.Ed.*

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## **Abstract**

Children who witness wife assault may be helped by appropriate intervention. This study sought to discover from teenagers, who witnessed abuse as children, whether a specific program of intervention in which they participated some years earlier had longstanding positive benefit. As well, in describing the efficacy of such a program, a better understanding about the recovery needs of children was gained. Seven adolescents (ages 14-16) from Eastern Newfoundland, Canada, participated in two ninety-minute interview sessions. A combination of open and close-ended questions focused on how being witness to wife assault shaped their attitudes and on their opinions of the program. Child witnesses presented a picture of homelife in which abusive episodes were woven into the fabric of daily living. The witnessing of the violence, along with the emotional climate, was depicted as an integrated experience and one which had lasted from their earliest remembrances until they escaped with their mothers. Fear, anger and helplessness characterized their immediate responses to the violence. The sense of loss with respect to place of origin, family, friends and childhood milestones was described as a more long-term response. Maintaining a close relationship with the mother was a significant way in which participants tried to cope with their feelings. In attempts to stop the violence participants would actively urge their mothers to leave, try to keep the peace with the abuser or, failing those, would

fantasize about a peaceful life. The participants were divided in their perceptions about the positive benefit of the group intervention. Four teens had actively worked at promoting change in their behaviors and attitudes, attributing their positive outlook to two factors. First, they were no longer living with abuse and, secondly, they had the opportunity to be involved in the group experience and to talk about their lives. Breaking the isolation was vitally important in allowing them to make sense of their lives. Three participants questioned the usefulness of the program. They did not feel that, even though they had left the abusive situations, their lives were much improved; nor did they view the world with a sense of optimism. They felt that they had to look after themselves, by themselves, trusting nobody else to help. Their willingness to participate in this research, however, suggests that they may be open to further intervention in an attempt to understand and accept their past. The intervention program had positive outcomes and could be used with confidence by helping professionals. More importantly, the themes identified should be useful information for individuals working with child witnesses of wife assault in the home.

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## Dedication

### Dedicated To

*Kim  
Jackie  
Terry  
Tammy  
Diane  
Eddie  
John*

Someday, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well-considered, and yet fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit; for such mutilation undercuts the life principle of trust, without which every human act, may it feel ever so good and seem ever so right, is prone to perversion by destructive forms of conscientiousness.

Erik Erikson  
Journal of the American  
Medical Association (1972)

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Many words in the English language have undergone metamorphoses in sound, spelling and definition. Family is one such word. Particularly since the end of World War Two there has been a dramatic shift in the institution that is the family.

The traditional family is defined narrowly as having two married parents, one of each gender, and children who are born as a result of that union. In 1951, in Canada, 24 couples married for every one couple who divorced (Vanier Institute of the Family, quoted in Nemeth, p. 31). By 1990 there were only 2.4 marriages for each divorce and one-third of all divorced people remarry (Vanier Institute of the Family, quoted in Nemeth, p. 32). Nemeth concludes that "the 1950s - style family, though not quite extinct, is on the endangered list" (p. 30). Certainly in the past four decades a concept of family has evolved to include other compositions. Today it is common to speak of the single-parent family, the extended family, the blended family, and the inter-racial family. These and other combinations, non-traditional as they may be, are, nonetheless family.

In seeking a workable or all inclusive definition of the family it may be more useful to consider what a family does than what it looks like. Whatever its structure, the family should be the most solid unit in our society and is

generally considered to be one which plays a major role in the physical, psychological, emotional, and social development of individuals. For example, parents admonish their children to stay away from strangers; children are encouraged to tell their families if anyone touches them inappropriately; and, parents search for reputable baby-sitters and daycare centers. These things are done in order to keep children safe and free from harm in a society which is becoming increasingly violent.

More frequently than ever before women are enrolling in self-defense classes so that they will be free to walk the street alone at night. Some women accept the notion that a particular manner of dress will provoke an attack from a male and, thus they will be careful not to appear deliberately attractive. Other women choose not to go out alone after dark. According to Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz (1980), however, "the cruel irony of staying home because one fears the violence in the streets is that the real danger of personal attack is in the home" (p. 18).

Family violence, although not a recent phenomenon, was not universally identified as a social issue until the 1960's when attention was drawn to children who were the victims of physical and emotional abuse. Following the documentation of the "battered baby syndrome" (Kempe, 1962), came the "battered wife syndrome" (Walker, 1979), which was a revelation of the prevalence of wife assault. Macleod (1987), citing her study (1980),

indicated that one Canadian woman in ten is likely to be abused by her partner. In comparison, an American study reported that, of the 2143 couples in the sample some form of physical violence occurred, over a one-year period, in one of every six couples (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980).

During the late 1970's and early 1980's the interest in and concern for wife assault increased and enlarged to include as well the indirect victims of such violence. Questions began to be raised about the possible effects upon the children in violent families. Macleod (1980) noted that these children may be directly affected, as victims of physical abuse, or they may be affected by observing abuse between parents, specifically, the beating of the mother by the father. The unintended victim, the child witness, had been until very recently, forgotten. Macleod (1980) emphasizes the need for help for such children. She maintains that:

These children really are the innocent victims of a major war being fought in many battles across the country. These kids are prisoners of that war. They are trapped in the actual violence while they are little and cannot get out on their own, and they may be trapped psychologically for the rest of their lives. We have got to get amnesty for these children. (p. 70)

In 1986 Wilson, Camron, Jaffe and Wolfe developed a specific intervention program for child witnesses. This study explores that program

with a view to determining the effectiveness of this particular program in helping children "... develop adaptive responses to experiences they have already encountered, learn effective and safe problem-solving techniques to confront future difficulties, focus on attitudes toward relationships and responsibility for behavior, examine the use of violence as an effective method for resolving conflict, and develop self-esteem" (Wilson, Cameron, Jaffe, & Wolfe, 1989, p. 183). The focus of the program is on education, understanding and prevention. (see Appendix A)

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is reported in the following manner. The remainder of Chapter I outlines the rationale for the study and presents a statement of the problem followed by the definition of any specialized terms. Chapter II presents a review and discussion of pertinent literature. Chapter III describes the methodology to be utilized in this study. Chapter IV presents and describes the findings. Chapter V presents a summary of the study and conclusions reached as well as the implications for further study.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Over the past 14 years this researcher has worked both in a medical setting with adults who have witnessed marital violence as children and with children in a shelter setting designed specifically for abused women and

children. This work experience has led to the belief that the effects of observing violence are both long lasting and far reaching. It is possible, however, for individuals, under guidance, to make sense of, rather than be conquered by, these experiences. This personal interest has developed over time and led to the desire to pursue more fully the issues of the child witness to wife assault.

Despite progress in research and program development with battered women and their husbands (Ganley & Harris, 1981; Peled, Jaffe & Edelson, 1995), little attention has been paid to children who witness this behavior. They are often referred to as the unintended victims of domestic violence. Shelters and transition houses have provided refuge for battered women and their children but even there the children have sometimes been considered appendages of the mother. Until the summer of 1989 a few shelters in Canada had counsellors hired specifically to work with children (Lovelace, 1991). Funding bodies within provincial governments had concluded that, unless the children had been directly abused, intervention was necessary only for the mother. The population consisting of the child witness is one likely to be forgotten. Walker (1979) described children's responses to the abuse that pervades their families as contributing to a dishonest conspiracy of silence:

They learn to suspend fulfilment of their own needs rather than risk another confrontation. Like many children who suffer from

overt physical abuse, these children learn to be accommodating and co-operative. They blend into the background. They do not express anger. They do not acknowledge tension ... they live in a world of make believe. (p. 150)

Most of the research around the effects of family violence on the child witness has focused on observable behavioral effects such as antisocial behavior. There is some debate about whether boys are more affected than are girls (Rutter, 1971), or whether it is just that boys exhibit behaviors that demand attention while girls react in more subtle ways (Carlson, 1984).

Within the last fifteen years some literature has emerged regarding the serious and long lasting consequences of witnessing violence (Hughes & Barad, 1983; Wolfe et al., 1985; Wagar, 1991) and attempts have been made to provide specific programs of remediation and intervention (Alessi & Hearn, 1984; Hughes, 1982; & Wilson, Cameron, Jaffe & Wolfe, 1989). Given that there is still a great deal to learn about the less observable effects of witnessing wife assault, it is reasonable to expect that subjects in this study may be able to help unravel the complexities. Questioning children from violent homes about their perceptions of themselves permits access to some possible effects of witnessing wife assault; for example, the destruction of adequate coping skills and the absence of feelings of self-worth. If a specific program can address issues such as these, it may point to future directions in

working with children who live with the after effects of being witness to wife assault. Carlson (1984) believes that "intervention with the child may, in essence, constitute the best form of primary prevention of adult domestic violence" (p. 160).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Considerable research has been conducted in the area of domestic violence. The effects of abuse on women and their recovery needs have also been addressed. While there has been much research to support the incidence and prevalence of child abuse and the effects on children of such abuse, there has been little research to verify the effects on the child witness of abuse within the home. As well, there are few intervention programs for children who witness wife assault. This study was designed to expand the body of knowledge about family violence. More specifically, the study seeks to gain an understanding, from the perspective of children, of the efficacy of a particular intervention program, with respect to the following:

- (1) their attitudes and responses to anger,
- (2) their knowledge of support and safety skills and,
- (3) their sense of responsibility for their parents and for the violence to which they were witness.



As well, the researcher wishes to provide a formalized description of children's perceptions of their experiences. Based on this information the researcher plans to outline a specific approach for working with child witnesses of family violence.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is crucial that effort be made to address the needs of the children who witness wife assault so that they may be less likely to model the behaviors they have seen. This study hopes to discover from teenagers, who witnessed abuse as children, whether a specific program of intervention in which they participated some years earlier has had longstanding positive benefit. As well, in describing the efficacy of such a program, the body of research into the recovery needs of children will be expanded.

The program evaluated in this study, if the results so warrant, may provide guidance counsellors with an effective tool in working with child witnesses.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the present study the following terms have been defined:

### **Wife Assault**

Marital violence, wife assault, domestic violence, wife abuse and partner abuse are often used interchangeably. Any one of them is defined as:

... the physical or psychological abuse directed by a man against his female partner, in an attempt to control her behavior or intimidate her. It can include only one episode with significant physical or emotional damage, but more frequently involves repeated, escalating incidents which result in physical injury or symptoms, or emotional or psychological sequelae which interfere with well-being or the functioning of the family.

(Frankel-Howard, 1989. p. 57)

Wife assault is the most appropriate term since it focuses attention on women, who are usually the victims, and they are generally married or living in a marital-like relationship with the perpetrators.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is defined as "... physical harm or the immediate threat of harm" (Stacey & Shupe, 1983, p. 5).

**Child Witness**

A child witness of abuse is defined as any person, under the age of 17, present when a woman is being physically harmed or is in danger of being hit physically.

**Intervention Program**

"Intervention program" will be defined as a formalized, structured set of weekly sessions designed to examine and improve:

- (1) children's attitudes and responses to anger
- (2) children's knowledge of support and safety skills and
- (3) children's sense of responsibility for their parents and for the violence (Wilson, Cameron, Jaffe & Wolfe, 1986).

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It has only been within the last decade that attempts have been made to study the possible effects on children who witness wife assault. Prior to that, the literature concerned itself almost exclusively with children who had been direct victims of family violence. Given that research addressing the impact of domestic violence on child witnesses is limited, other sources of data which would give some indication of the possible effects of traumatic life events have been consulted.

#### **Studies of Marital Discord**

Jacobsen (1978), in a study of children in divorcing families, found that there was a significant association between interparental discord and behavioral problems in the children. He went on to say that the greater the degree of marital conflict preceding the divorce, the greater the behavioral disturbance. Rutter (1975), questioned whether, in the case of a divorce or a death, the children are affected adversely because one parent is missing or because there are other factors. He concluded that there was a closer link between behavioral problems and parental conflict than between behavioral problems and parental death. Similarly, Hodges (1986), citing the work of Hetherington (1979), observed that children who live in broken or intact homes where the

parents are involved in constant conflict are more likely to exhibit adjustment problems. Emery (1982) noted that there is a relationship between discord in intact marriages and the severity or frequency of behavior problems in children. Zill (cited in Hodges, 1986), after surveying 1423 children, found that children of divorce had fewer behavioral problems than did children from intact families in which there was chronic conflict (p. 58). Emery (1982) quoting Hetherington (1979), stated that "... children from broken or intact homes where there is interparental conflict are at greater risk for problems than are children from broken or intact homes that are relatively harmonious" (p. 313). Emery identified the amount of conflict or hostility between parents, rather than the actual experience of separation and loss, as the major variable in determining the social adjustment of children.

### **Studies of Long-Term Effects**

Some studies which have considered the intergenerational pattern of violence and provided examples of the long-term effects of exposure of wife assault are based on social learning theory which purports that violence is a learned pattern of responses entrenched in modelling violent behavior (Pagelow, 1984). The assumption is made that male children model their fathers while females imitate their mothers and that consequently, boys mature into abusers while the girls succumb to the role of victim.

Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) are noted for their work in the area of intergenerational violence. Their study indicated that individuals who grow up in violent homes repeat the abuse in their own homes. Furthermore, being a victim of abuse as a child was closely associated with further marital violence. Straus (1980), and his associates, however, claimed that there was a greater impact if the subject had both experienced and witnessed abuse.

In a longitudinal study, Miller and Challas (1981; in Roy, 1988) followed 118 parents, 29 of whom had been abused as children and 89 who had not. They concluded that:

- (1) Fathers who were abused as children were more likely to be abusive parents than were mothers who were abused as children (31% vs. 19%), and
- (2) About 41% of all abused subjects had children removed from their homes by court action as opposed to 25% of non-abused subjects.

Gelles (1972) centred on the likelihood of women who had witnessed violence in the family of origin becoming victims in their own marriages. He concluded that the more frequently a woman was struck by her parents, in addition to witnessing violence, the more susceptible to marital violence she became.

In defence of the generational cycle hypothesis Roy (1988) points to a 1977 survey conducted by New York City's Abused Women's Aid In Crisis Incorporated, a non-profit action group which randomly chose 150 cases from

a pool of 1000. This group found that 81.1% of the abusive partners of these 150 women were exposed to violence at home at an early age either by being directly abused or by virtue of being witness to the abuse of their mothers by their fathers. Roy (1988) noted, however, "it does not explain why 100% of the abuser's siblings don't grow up to beat their wives and children but it does substantiate that when there is a high level of violence in the home, chances are four out of five that at least one sibling will tend to become an abusing marital partner and parent. This would confirm, rather than devalue the likelihood of the cyclic nature of spouse and child abuse" (p. 15).

Roy (1988) makes a final, novel point in support of the transmission of violence as generational. Admittedly, the kind of certainty is not ascribed to the term that would be given to a hereditary disease, however. "... if we consider the home environment as tantamount to a school classroom, we could not possibly expect all of the students (in the case of family violence the students being the children and the parents being the teachers) to learn everything that they observe or are taught in exactly the same way, nor do we expect all of the students will receive the same grades" (p. 16).

There are critics of the studies emphasizing the intergenerational pattern of violence. Pagelow (1984) claimed that, in her group of abused women, 75 % had never witnessed their mothers beaten by their fathers. Similarly, Roy (1988) admits that not every child who witnesses violence will grow up to

be abusive. However, to say that the idea of generational transmission should be suspect and subject to more sophisticated research, based on the finding from a few isolated families, is unsound.

Kalmus (1984) recognized the inconsistencies in the findings and argued that more distinction must be made between the effects of experiencing and observing violence in an individual's family of origin. From a large scale, nationally representative adult sample, Kalmus (1984) reported that the subjects who acknowledged the witnessing of hitting and striking between parents were more likely, at the time of study, to be entangled in severe marital violence than were the subjects who indicated they had been victims as teenagers, of physical assaults from parents. We can conclude from this that the witnessing of violence may be more insidious and have greater long-term, negative effects than one might expect.

While it is commonly touted that 'violence begets violence,' Carroll (1977) states that there is little definite evidence to support this belief that violence is inherited. Dobash and Dobash (1979) agree that children learn to accept violence in the home as an appropriate means of problem-solving, yet they maintain that it is not appropriate to " ... leap to the conclusion that children who witness assaults on their mothers are necessarily the seedpods of the next generation of violent families" (p. 152).



Macleod (1987) points out that it may be more useful to consider the circumstances under which the transmission of violence may occur. The various family theories, she argues, do not account for the strong emotional bond between victim and abuser and the ambivalence that exists within such a relationship. Such complexities led her to an examination of women's understandings of the battering experiences. In a similar vein, listening to children's perceptions of their home situations can lead to better understanding of their experiences and may culminate in more appropriate means of interventions with this population.

### **Symptoms as Outlined in Clinical and Anecdotal Reports**

In considering the behavior of children who witness domestic violence, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) established that sons who witness abuse engage in violence 10 times more often than do boys of non-violent backgrounds. Exposure to marital violence is related to a greater frequency of externalizing (aggressive, delinquent acts) and internalizing (withdrawn, anxious) child behavior problems, especially in boys (Hughes & Barad, 1983; Porter & O'Leary, 1980; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985). These children are often below their peers in areas reflecting social competence such as school performance, organized sports and social involvement (Wolfe, Zak, Wilson, & Jaffe, 1986). Generally, child witnesses

of family violence exhibited more behavior problems with the exception of latency age girls who exhibited fewer behavior problems overall (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986). Boys' problems related to inappropriate social interactions, peer aggressiveness, destructiveness, mood changes, and disobedience. The seriousness of some of these children's difficulties is apparent from the similarity of symptoms to children who have been abused by parents (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986; Hodges, 1986).

As a result of a 3-year study of children (aged 5 - 14) living in shelters for battered women, Jaffe et al. (1985) wrote that children of battered women were rated as displaying significantly more behavior problems and less social competence than did a comparison group of children from non-violent homes. Of 102 children, 35% of boys and 20% of girls fell within the clinical range of behaviour problems. Subsequent regression analysis findings confirmed that family violence is closely associated with two significant factors, namely, the level of maternal adjustment and the indices of family dysfunction, which very probably produce behavior problems identified among children exposed to wife battering (Wolfe et al., 1985, cited in Jaffe, Wilson & Wolfe, 1986).

Professionals who have provided medical or psychiatric services to violent families have observed various behavioral characteristics shared among the children in these families. With reference to this Bennett (1989, referred to a study of Hilberman and Munsen in which they described the "school

phobias, somatic complaints, insomnia and enuresis of preschool and younger school-aged children and the aggressive behavior and school difficulties of the older school aged child" (p. 14). Alessi and Hearn (1984) noted that young children in violent families were fearful and irritable while older school-aged children wavered between defiant and compliant behavior. These researchers concluded that some of the characteristics shared by such children between the ages of two to seventeen were: (1) a tendency to use aggressive tactics to solve problems, (2) a tendency to blame themselves for parental disputes, (3) complaints of physical ailments, resulting from high anxiety, and (4) the expression of ambivalent feelings towards the abusive father. Jaffe et al. (1986) extended this line of research and concluded that children of violent parents learn six lessons:

- (1) violence is an appropriate form of conflict resolution;
- (2) violence has a place within the family interaction;
- (3) if violence is reported to others in the community, including mental health and criminal justice professionals, there are few, if any, consequences;
- (4) sexism, as defined by an inequality of power, decision-making ability, and roles within the family, is to be encouraged;
- (5) violence is an appropriate means of stress management; and

(6) victims of violence are, at best, to tolerate this behavior and, at worst, to examine their responsibility in bringing on the violence (p. 360).

Porter and O'Leary (1980), through studying children identified as living in violent homes, attempted to examine children's responses to witnessing physical violence. In looking at the relationship between physical violence directed at the mother and behavioral problems in children, Porter and O'Leary (1980) concluded that overt, physical violence correlated significantly with behavior problems in boys but was not related to behavior problems in girls.

Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981), after establishing the need to use comparison groups of women who were not physically abused, but who had problem marriages, studied the effects of overt physical violence by using three groups of women and their school-age male children. One group was composed of women in maritally abusive relationships, another consisted of women in non-abusive but problem marriages, while the third group of women had satisfactory marital relationships. Surprisingly, it was suggested that children from abusive relationships were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, even though there were no statistically significant differences among the groups. This led the researchers to the conclusion that even though

exposure to marital discord and violence contributed to behavior problems, other factors may be involved.

Results of a later study supported the assumption that marital discord and violence are associated with behavior problems in children. Hershorn and Rosenbaum (1985) used the same comparison groups as Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) and were able to provide statistically significant differences among the groups. They could not, though, provide evidence that children from maritally violent homes exhibited more behavior problems than did children from maritally discordant homes. This suggests that the type of conflict, whether it is of an open, physically violent nature or of a more covert, subtle nature, is not a significant factor in determining the impact on children.

### **Studies of Children's Perceptions**

Children's perceptions of violence to which they have been witness in their homes and their interpretations of such violence are two aspects of the larger subject of domestic violence which appear to have received little direct study. Indeed, the subject of children as witnesses to violence has had little attention in the professional literature, particularly since about 1990. This notwithstanding, the subject is one which cannot be dismissed. This is the opinion of Wolfe and his associates (1985) who noted the importance of

identifying such mediating factors as would be influential in assisting children to deal positively with these traumatic experiences. Among the mediating factors mentioned were social supports, personality differences and life experiences.

Some researchers, however, have addressed children's perceptions of their family situations. In studies by Emery (1982), Hazzard, Christensen and Margolin (1983), and O'Leary (1987) similar behavioral checklists or scales were used with both the children and their parents. Subsequently, the responses of children and parents were compared for consistency. This approach appeared to be driven by an intent to use the responses of parents to corroborate those of the children. When the responses of the two groups differed the validity of the children's responses was questioned. Bennett (1989) questioned this approach. "What would seem to be a more important consideration," according to Bennett, "is the meaning such observations may have in understanding the phenomena as a whole, rather than challenging children's reporting as a valid source of data" (p. 26).

### **Intervention Programs**

In 1979, Grusznski and his associates founded the Domestic Abuse Project in an effort to supplement shelter services in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area. One aspect of this project involved a systematic ten-week

program of intervention with children who were witnesses of violence at home. The major components of the program were:

- (1) establishing responsibility for the violence,
- (2) feelings of shame,
- (3) living in isolation,
- (4) planning for one's protection,
- (5) resolving conflict,
- (6) adopting gender roles,
- (7) developing self-esteem, and
- (8) expressing feelings.

Clinical rating scales completed for 371 children, over a five year period, determined that:

- (1) a majority of the children acknowledged that the violence they saw in their homes was not their fault;
- (2) children's self-esteem increased;
- (3) children learned new ways to protect themselves from violence;
- (4) children learned alternate ways to resolve conflict other than resorting to violence; and
- (5) children developed an increased knowledge of formal and informal support systems. (Grusznski et al., p. 443)

Even though the results looked promising Grusznski (1988) stressed the importance of further research that would include follow-up interviews with children well after the end of the program.

Wagar (1991) in evaluating the effectiveness of a specific intervention program (Jaffe, Cameron, Wilson, & Wolfe, 1986) stressed the importance of listening to child witnesses in a group setting as a part of the method in carrying out sound, empirical research in evaluating group approaches for this population. Further, Wagar (1991) concluded that "...the awareness of the intergenerational component to family violence has resulted in a strong suggestion of the importance of longitudinal research with group participants to study the longer term effects of the program on the children" (p. 100).

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has dealt with studies of marital discord, studies of long-term effects, symptoms as outlined in clinical and anecdotal reports, and studies of children's perceptions. Because of the limited research centered specifically around child witnesses of wife assault, other supporting research was consulted. Emerging from the literature review are a number of points which have direct or indirect relevance to the present study. They are:



- (1) that the amount of conflict that children witness between parents is a major variable in the social adjustment of children,
- (2) that children model adult behaviors they observe, thereby resulting in males assuming abuser roles and females adopting victim roles,
- (3) that being witness to wife assault may have negative, long-lasting effects,
- (4) that intervention with child witnesses is a crucial step in challenging and breaking the generational cycle of violence, and
- (5) that longitudinal research with child witnesses who have participated in a program of intervention will assist in determining the efficacy of such a program.

### **Chapter III**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

In the fall of 1990 this researcher co-facilitated a group for child witnesses to domestic violence. The children and their mothers gave permission for the facilitators to collect data from pre and post interviews with the children. At the time the group was conducted it was hoped that the program of intervention would be effective in promoting positive change in the following:

- (1) children's responses to anger,
- (2) children's knowledge and use of safety skills, and
- (3) children's feelings of responsibility for their parents and for the violence they had witnessed.

The data collected was not analyzed at that time. The researcher recently analyzed the data and also conducted audiotaped interviews of the original subjects, all of whom are now teenagers.

### **Selection of Group Participants in 1990**

The children were chosen based on the following criteria:

- (1) the family had spent, at least, six weeks at Iris Kirby House, a shelter for abused women and children, in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.
- (2) the family had been living away from the shelter for four to six weeks,

- (3) the family was not currently living with the identified abuser,
- (4) the children were between nine and twelve years of age,
- (5) the children had no known pathology, and
- (6) the children were identified as being witness to wife assault.

Seven children from ages nine to twelve were selected because of the current gaps in this age group in the literature. Four females and three males were included as a mixed group would be a more representative sample of the general population. Meetings were held each Thursday, for a period of two hours each, from September to mid-November, 1990.

#### **Data Collection from 1990 Group Participants**

##### **(1) Child Witness to Violence Questionnaire -- Appendix B**

This questionnaire, developed by Jaffe and his associates (1986), is designed to elicit responses in three specific areas, those being: the child's attitudes and responses to anger; the child's sense of responsibility for the violence; and, the child's knowledge and use of safety skills. It was administered before and after participation in the Group Program for Children Who Witness Domestic Violence.

While Jaffe acknowledged that further research into the validity and reliability of the Child Witness to Violence Interview is needed (Wagar, 1991) there is already evidence of the validity of the instrument. Jaffe (1989) describes how he and his colleagues compared two groups of children who were similar in age, sex

distribution, number of siblings and family income. Responses given by 28 children exposed to wife assault were compared to responses from a matched control group of 28 children who were not exposed to wife assault. Scores were converted to percentages with 100% representing the most appropriate responses for each scale. The results showed that children who witnessed violence in their families had more inappropriate responses to anger and less knowledge about safety skills. Further discussion of this researcher's findings is included in Chapter V.

## (2) Group Participant Evaluation - 1990

This was a set of questions formulated by the co-facilitators of the group and completed by each individual child (Appendix D). It was hoped that the children, by answering the questions, would give an overall picture of their group experience. While this form has not been tested for reliability and validity the information derived from the children's responses will aid in the discussion of the efficacy of the intervention program.

## **Program Description**

The Manual for a Group Program for Children Exposed to Wife Abuse focuses on prevention and education. It is designed for children who are not currently living in a crisis situation either at home or in a shelter setting. The program was developed to assist children to learn adaptive responses to past experiences they have witnessed and to strengthen their abilities for safe problem-

solving in the future. Three additional components integral to the program are: a focus on attitudes to relationships and responsibility for behavior; an examination of the use of violence as an effective means for resolving conflict; and, the development of children's self-esteem (Wilson, Cameron, Jaffe & Wolfe, 1989). The intervention program was devised for children between the ages of eight and thirteen. The authors suggest that, although the group may include up to ten participants, an optimum number is somewhere between six and nine.

The Group Program for Children Who Witness Domestic Violence is structured such that it can be delivered in ten sessions, one session per week. This program is particularly suited for the focus areas in which this researcher is interested.

The following is a brief description of each of the ten sessions which comprises the program.

#### Session One: Introduction

This introductory session is designed to help participants feel they are not alone. Children are encouraged to respect the privacy and confidentiality of all members. The co-facilitators explain the limits as they relate to abuse, past or present.

In addition to helping children feel they share common experiences a definition of violence is included. The group considers different types of violence (television

scenes, abuse within families, violence among peers, self-injurious behavior). To facilitate group cohesion all children participate in an activity such as painting a mural.

### Session Two: Labelling Feelings

In addition to helping children become more comfortable with expressing their feelings in the group, the facilitators provide tools or props to aid this process.

Children generate a list of feelings after which the word "feeling" is defined. The participants are asked to give an example of when they felt a particular way, for example, angry, sad, hurt, or happy. Children may also read prepared real-life situations and reflect on how they would feel in the given situation. During the second half of this meeting children are asked to cut out pictures of people that reflect one of four feeling areas, happy, sad, angry or afraid.

### Session Three: Dealing With Anger

This session helps children understand that their feelings of anger are quite legitimate and it is their reactions to their feelings that are or are not appropriate. Learning that there are healthy responses to anger is an important aspect of this session.

The children are asked to brainstorm healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with anger. Then scenarios are presented which have some kind of conflict outlined. Children are encouraged to find appropriate methods to handle the conflict.

Finally children are aided in realizing how their bodies react to conflict and how, when people are angry, there is a physical reaction, often tension somewhere in the body. Children are exposed to relaxation techniques.

#### Session Four: Safety Skills

This session begins with a defining and a discussion of the various types of abuse. This leads to a consideration of who is responsible for the violence within the home. Children are assisted in outlining safety skills and are encouraged to think about what they can do to protect themselves when fighting occurs anywhere they are, most specifically, when violence occurs in their homes.

#### Session Five: Social Support

Children are asked to identify their current social support system and say what is positive about it. The main objective of this session is to equip children with a knowledge of local community resources which can be used as a part of anyone's support system. Children are encouraged to identify their own supports so they know where people are when children need to contact them.

#### Session Six: Social Competence and Self-Concept

There are three objectives in this session. They are:

- (1) have children focus on how they perceive themselves in their surroundings, both as individuals and in relation to others,

- (2) help children understand that their self perceptions are directly related to their experiences at home, and
- (3) increase children's self-confidence.

These objectives are achieved through an activity called "Life Puzzle".

Children are given pieces that fit together to represent their lives. Each piece signifies one area of their lives. Children piece the puzzles together discussing how they perceive themselves in each area, be it at home, at school, or with friends.

#### Session Seven: Responsibility for Parents/Violence

Essentially the objective of this session is to help children understand who is responsible for the violence occurring in their families. It is stressed that the perpetrator is always responsible and that excuses such as being drunk are never acceptable.

#### Session Eight: Understanding Family Violence

Some of the myths surrounding family violence are discussed. A discussion of the cycle of violence is also important and assists children in thinking about how their responses to anger are similar to or different from those of their parents. Child sexual abuse is often discussed here, with an emphasis on debunking the common beliefs centred around the victim's role in the incident or incidents.



### **Session Nine: Wishes About Family**

This session allows the children to talk openly and freely about what they like and do not like about their present living situations. Much time is given to help the children focus on how they can concentrate on the positive aspects of their family situation while learning to deal with the less desirable or potentially explosive components. This session allows for an open exchange of children's feelings of divorce and separation. Films may be used to aid discussion.

### **Session Ten: Review and Termination**

The objective of this session is to review the issues that were presented, summarize what the children have learned and to end on a positive, hopeful note. The emphasis is placed on the children's abilities and strengths. In particular the children are encouraged to compare how they felt at the beginning of the ten weeks with how they feel now, having acquired new positive skills, more knowledge about the issues with which they live and some new friends.

### **Description of 1995 Participants**

Each adolescent was approached and asked to participate in the research. Consent was received from the teen and the mother. The following table outlines some demographic information about the participants.

Subject and Gender	Age	Hometown Area Prior to St. John's	Presently Attending School	Grade
1 (F)	14	Burin Peninsula	Yes	8
2 (F)	16	St. John's	Yes	Level 1
3 (M)	16	St. John's	Yes	9
4 (F)	14	St. John's	Yes	8
5 (F)	14	St. John's	Yes	8
6 (M)	15	Placentia Bay	Yes	9
7 (M)	15	Avalon Peninsula	Yes	9

#### Data Collection from 1995 Participants

The ethnographic information in this study was gathered as a result of individual interviews the researcher held with teenagers who attended, five years previous, a group program for children who witness wife assault. Spradley (1980), writes that "ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (p. 3). It is true that distressed families are a part of all cultures, they exist in all geographic settings and across all socio-economic levels. Consider, though, that violent families are closed and isolated (Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 1986). The dynamics within such families is a culture of its own, especially when culture is defined as "...the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior" (Spradley, 1980, p. 6). In an ethnographic study the researcher's

role is to describe the subjects' view of reality (i.e., to understand child witnesses one must gain access to their thoughts and perceptions of their realities). These realities may be seen as socially constructed as a result of an individual's interpretation of his or her experiences. One's interpretations of his/her environment and experiences certainly influence thoughts and behavior. While behaviors are observable thoughts are not and so a researcher needs another method of reflecting them. To assist in this descriptive process, data are collected in the form of written and spoken words rather than as numbers or statistical information.

Through in-depth interviews this researcher was able to understand the subjective realities of children who have witnessed wife assault at home. The interviews allowed the children to describe their lives and to reflect upon their earlier involvement in an intervention program, thereby revealing their subjective realities as child witnesses. Seven in-depth audiotaped interviews conducted by the researcher and designed to examine the current life situations of participants were conducted in the teenagers' homes. The interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher to broaden her understanding by gaining more detailed information and to uncover new aspects of the issues for child witnesses as perceived by the participants. The questions allowed the adolescents to share their views of the intervention programs.

Each participant was individually interviewed in two sessions, each approximately one and one half hours in duration. The first interview was more formal as respondents completed a questionnaire and responded orally to a

combination of open and closed questions. A number of guideline questions were developed in each of the three areas of focus (Appendix E). Session Two involved participants responding to both open and closed questions. These questions were different for each individual as they were based on the initial responses of the participants. The aim was to give each participant ample time to elaborate on each area of focus. Some topics were raised a second time as a validity check. All inconsistencies in participant responses were readdressed in an indirect and non-invasive manner. Supplementary questions (Appendix F) were asked during the second interview. Time was given to the interviewee for free expression. The interviews were spaced two days apart.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were gathered from the Child Witness to Violence Questionnaire and are presented in Chapter V. The statistical results from 1990 were compared with the descriptive analysis of 1995.

Following ethnographic methodology, that is, a concentration on how people see, explain and describe order in the world in which they live (Bogdan & Biklon, 1982, as quoted in Kottman & White, 1989), after each interview the researcher transcribed the audiotapes and recorded personal notes including: emerging themes, items needing clarification, factors that may have affected the interview process and

an assessment of the researcher's interview style. These are presented in more detail in Chapter IV.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations in the design of this study, and as a result conclusions must be drawn carefully. Specific limitations that may bias the data include the following:

1. The sample was small and not representative of all adolescents who witness wife assault, therefore, generalization is questionable.
2. The researcher was also the interviewer, therefore, the analysis of data may not be completely objective.
3. Participants may not have wanted to reveal any information they perceived as being critical of the program.
4. Participants may not have answered questions fully and said only what they thought the researcher wanted to hear.

Despite these limitations the information gathered should add to the body of knowledge about child witnesses.

## **Chapter IV**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter will be presented in four sections. Section I provides a profile of each of the participants in the study. Included in each profile is a description of at least some of the environmental circumstances with which the individual was surrounded before arriving at the shelter in St. John's. Each profile is deliberately personal and contains the viewpoints of the teen who was interviewed. It is the researcher's intent to attach a human face to the anonymous issue of child witnesses. Allowing the reader to catch a glimpse, even briefly, of the lives of seven young people helps to breathe life into this project, to ensure that people, not statistics, are at the centre of the discussion.

Section II will identify the common themes which emerged from the statements of the participants when they spoke about their personal experiences and what it meant to witness abuse at home. The themes which are identified are followed by quotations and explanations.

Section III will detail the perceptions of the participants with respect to their views on the efficacy of the specific program of intervention with which they were involved. Illustrative quotations will be used to support the findings.

Section IV will concern itself with a listing of the recovery needs of child witnesses identified by the participants and briefly elaborated upon by the researcher. Quotations will be used as illustrations.

All quotations included herein are written, for the most part, in the language of the participants. Passages were edited where the researcher considered certain words or phrases to be offensive to the reader. The meaning of the responses, however, was kept intact. All proper names and any other identifying information were changed to protect anonymity. Since proper names help to ensure that the participants remain real, a fictitious name was chosen by each participant to facilitate easier reading.

The researcher admits to having a particular dislike of the term 'kid' when used to describe a child. Since the general public does not appear to find this term offensive, it has been left unaltered in the content and reported whenever used by participants.

**Profile of Respondent #1: Kim, 14 years old.**

For many children the first day of school is one to be remembered fondly. For Kim it is one she wishes she could forget. Her widowed mother, recently remarried, would not take her daughter to school because the black eye and neck bruises she, herself, had sustained during a beating on the Labour Day weekend were still visible. Kim's older brother took her to her classroom and told her he would be back later. If anyone asked, Kim was to say that her mother was sick. She sat in her seat, a frightened, lonely, sad little girl, who wanted desperately to be home with her mother.

The fear and the sense of helplessness which Kim felt that day continued to be a part of her life for nearly five years. During that time she saw her mother pushed, beaten by her stepfather's fists and kicked in the stomach. The verbal assaults were regular and brutal. Kim and her brothers were the recipients of some of the name-calling. Kim grew accustomed to hearing that she was useless, worthless and just like her mother.

Kim does not remember any happy times when her mother and stepfather were together. "If it was quiet in the house I think we were all waiting for the next fight to begin. We knew there would be another racket, we just didn't know when," Kim recalls. Living with an abusive stepfather and witnessing his attacks upon her mother and knowing that a violent episode could erupt at any moment seriously hampered Kim's social activities. She did not ask friends to come home with her and rarely did she go to a friend's house after school. Upon reflection, Kim feels she spent most of her time at home in order to look after her mother. Although she could not protect her mother, Kim would always try to comfort her after a fight. Despite her stepfather's jeers and ridicule, Kim sat steadfastly by her mother's side telling her not to cry. "In my mind at that time, I guess I thought that I had to look after Mom. I can remember thinking that if I was in the house he would not kill her."

Kim's stepfather did separate them one night though. As he was striking Kim's mother he was pushing her toward the door. Eventually he succeeded in getting her outside and locking the door. Kim's mother went to her sister's house and



tried to phone home. The children were not permitted to answer the phone. In fact, Kim's stepfather took the phone out of the wall jack and kept it with him. He ordered the children to their bedrooms. That night was particularly painful since Kim "... did not know where Mom was. I figured she went over to (aunt's) house but I didn't know for sure and I didn't know when she'd come back. I went to bed curled up in a ball and cried into my pillow all night. I think my heart broke right in two that night."

Kim's mother did return and no mention was made of the incident. Kim learned to pretend that things were pretty normal. When her mother was hurt Kim said she was sick. In all the years Kim's mother stayed with her abusive husband, never once did she admit to Kim that she was an abused woman. "She knew that I knew he beat her. I watched him more than once." This contradiction was confusing to Kim. It was "... like what I saw I didn't really see or I couldn't say I saw. I had to make up excuses. Thinking back on it now it seems so unreal and mixed up. I don't really know how we all survived it."

Survival came, in part, when Kim's mother decided to leave the relationship. The decision was made quickly one evening after Kim's older brother tried to intervene in a fight between his mother and her husband. The stepfather turned to grab the boy when Kim's mother said something like, "you touch that boy and I will kill you and may God forgive me." In the next second she told the children to grab their coats and run to the convent. "Ask Sister to call the police. I'm right behind

you. I'll never forget that night. In a way it was a good thing that (stepfather) was going to hit (brother). It made Mom realize how bad the situation was. It made me realize, not at the time probably, but later on, that Mom wasn't willing for us to be hit. She really did want to protect us. She loved us but she didn't know what living with him was doing to us."

Early the next morning the family arrived at the shelter. During the six week stay there were many opportunities to talk about what had happened and to make plans for the future. Kim and her family subsequently moved into a house in St. John's and, as Kim says, "never looked back." Not every day has been easy but "no day has been as bad as the ones before we left. I'm happy now," says Kim flashing a broad smile across her freckled face.

**Profile of Respondent #2: Jackie, 16 years old.**

When Jackie was eleven years old her evenings did not consist of completing homework and getting ready for bed in a safe secure home. Instead, she found herself, night after night, sitting up with her mother, in the dark, listening to every sound, waiting to hear whether Jackie's father was returning to break into the house. Sitting on the chesterfield, in a house in the centre of St. John's, Jackie took little catnaps, bolting wide awake at the slightest sound. Only when dawn broke through would she go to bed for a couple of hours and then get up to face another day.

"It's hard to say which life was better," recalled Jackie. "When Mom and Dad were together I knew there would be trouble. I knew Mom would get beaten and I knew how to stay out of the way. After Mom left Dad the situation changed. Waiting to see what he was going to do, that was horrible. It was like we were all going around holding our breath. In a way he was still there because we were still terrified. We weren't safe and we sure weren't free."

Jackie does not remember her parents as being a couple in love, respecting and caring for each other and their children. There was always turmoil in the house whether it consisted of bitter arguments or physical assaults upon Jackie's mother. Jackie was the oldest of three children. Over time Jackie assumed responsibility for helping her sister and brother who are now fourteen years and ten years, respectively. "I just sort of fell into looking after them, getting them dressed, washed and fed, that kind of thing. After a while Mom just figured I'd do it. She had enough to deal with, anyway, with Dad always on her case."

"Dad always on her case" is a subtle way of describing years of emotional and physical abuse. Jackie's mother suffered beatings that bruised her body and battered her soul. Jackie and her siblings never intervened mainly because "Mom told us to stay away, stay out of the way." Jackie spent many nights with her head under her pillow, trying to drown out the sounds of her father's curses and her mother's cries.

Jackie never brought any friends home from school because she was ashamed of her father and completely embarrassed by the whole family situation. She

questioned the use of the word family. "We weren't a family, not really. Dad ignored me and my sister and only spent time with my brother now and then. When he wanted to humiliate Mom he'd call us out to the living room and say things about Mom, calling her dirty names. We'd cry but he wouldn't stop.... And we didn't understand."

Fear and confusion remained with Jackie for many years. It was incomprehensible to her that her father could hurt her mother so brutally. Jackie remembers her mother going to work, a professional woman, hiding her sorrow and putting on a brave face for everyone. Jackie and her siblings would be dropped off with their maternal grandmother before Jackie's mother went to work and then would be picked up again at the end of the day. To the casual onlooker everything appeared normal.

For about two years before Jackie's mother left her husband the situation deteriorated. "Mom was under so much stress she could not keep working. She had to resign but she never told anyone what was really going on. She just said she had personal problems." Jackie reports her mother was very upset about having to resign and saw it as a sign of her failure to provide for her children. Jackie's father never missed a chance to taunt his wife about what a loser she was.

In an interesting turn of events, however, it was the loss of that job that propelled Jackie's mother to further action. Jackie returned home from school one day, weeks after her mother left her job. Jackie's father was berating her for putting

the family in poverty. "You're so stupid, you can't even keep a job. You're useless, ugly, stupid piece of crap," Jackie recalled him saying. In a low voice, Jackie's mother said, "If I'm so bad, what are you doing with me? Why are you still here?" This was uncharacteristic of Jackie's mother, as she had long since ceased to reply to any of the abuse. It surprised Jackie's father, as well. He turned around, picked up his wife and threw her against the kitchen wall. "Don't you ever answer back to me," he snarled as Jackie's mother crumbled to the floor. Then he left the house. "It seemed like at that moment Mom made a decision." "She called me over and said we were leaving. She called the police and two officers came. I'll never forget when Mom said, 'If I don't leave I'll kill him or kill myself or kill the both of us.' I was frightened to death, I never heard Mom speak like that before."

Before going to the shelter Jackie's mother needed a stay in hospital. The children stayed with their grandmother for six weeks and then went to the shelter with their mother. That initial step set the course for a better life for Jackie's mother and the children. The fear has not completely gone but it has subsided. Jackie sleeps at night now. The confusion is still there for her. She has many questions about why things happened the way they did and is not sure she will ever truly understand or accept it. "I wasn't a happy child and I wanted to be. I try not to hate Dad or Mom for what happened but I know it wasn't my fault so whose was it? I try to forget but I can't. And every time a knock comes on the door my heart skips a beat 'cause I'm afraid what is on the other side."

**Profile of Respondent #3: Terry, 15 years old.**

Terry grew up in a house in downtown St. John's. His bedroom window looked out over the harbour. Terry loved to watch ships come and go and often, as a young boy, he wished he was on one of the boats sailing away anywhere because anywhere was better than where he was. Staying in the city meant having to live with his father's alcoholic rages which had become all too familiar to Terry, the youngest of three children. When his father was drunk Terry either left the house or went into the basement. He knew that his parents would argue and that his mother would be hurt. She had a better chance to escape physical harm when her husband was drunk but the verbal insults would resound throughout the house. The problem was not the use of alcohol, however. Terry's father was a violent man, drunk or sober. The beatings that Terry's mother sustained when her husband was sober were often more serious; at least when Terry's father was drunk he would eventually pass out.

Learning how to stay out of the way and to look after himself were lessons quickly accepted by Terry. He grew accustomed to the strife, toughened himself to it and vowed that nobody would ever hurt him like he had witnessed his mother being hurt. Guilt and confusion accompanied his decision to get out of the way of his father's blows. "Sometimes I used to think I could do something to make it (the violence) stop but I didn't know what to do." Sadly, in that family, Terry was witness to his older brother being physically abused, as well. His brother, Tom, four years Terry's senior, often tried to stop his father from being violent toward his

mother. Tom suffered the blows himself. "Dad would punch him around the head, strike his ears and pound on his back. Tom wouldn't give in though." Fear of his father kept Terry rather invisible in the family.

By the time he was eleven Terry had repeatedly heard his father blame Terry's mother for the violence he inflicted upon her or else he blamed the children. Although Terry knew in his head that none of that was true there were times when he found himself thinking that maybe he was part of the problem. "See, sometimes Dad would be beating Mom and he would say that if she'd do better, like keep house better or teach us better, he wouldn't have to hit her. My sister was born mentally slow and he blamed Mom for that. I always knew the difference, really, but sometimes I'd think he must be right. It was pretty strange."

Knowing the difference was not sufficient to keep Terry from being terribly hurt by and disappointed in his father. He missed out on things fathers and sons do together and he felt he could not have a normal relationship with his mother because she was always so worried about what would happen next.

According to Terry she had plenty of reason to worry. Terry's father often threatened to kill Terry's mother, warning her to always watch her back. "Mom was afraid and he'd laugh at her." There was a hunting gun in the house so Terry had no reason to believe that his father would not make good on his threats. Living with uncertainty and fear shaped Terry's early attitudes. He longed to get away and

wanted his mother to be free, as well. He admitted that his first thought was for himself and siblings. He saw his mother as an adult who just wouldn't leave.

But leave they eventually did, one Christmas Eve night. Terry's father had been away all day returning around 10 p.m. He was drunk and almost immediately upon entering the house he began to complain about the Christmas tree. It was not a real tree, being artificial, he said, "it wasn't decorated properly, there weren't enough lights on it." He went over to the tree and deliberately knocked it over and began stamping on it. Terry's mother tried to pull him away but she merely got shoved out of the way.

Before long two police officers arrived in response to a call from someone in the neighbourhood. They talked to Terry's mother for a while and encouraged her to leave. She decided to pack a few things and go with her children to the shelter. "Waking up on Christmas morning in a strange place with strangers and staff was weird. I didn't want to be home either," recalled Terry. During the six-week stay Terry remained on the periphery of activities, preferring to be an observer rather than an active participant. The family moved on to live in a different area of the city. Terry is glad of the tranquillity at home now which is only occasionally marred by his father's attempts to re-enter the family. "It'll never happen," Terry vows, "never again."



**Profile of Respondent #4: Tammy, 14 years old.**

Tammy was the daughter of two professional parents, both teachers in St. John's. She spent her first years in a large house in an affluent neighbourhood. By all accounts Tammy's was the model family, two parents, two children, two cars and even a white picket fence. This idyllic picture belied what actually occurred inside the ornate wooden doors.

Tammy recalled one of the first times she saw her mother abused by her father. Tammy's mother could not explain why she arrived home later than expected, or, at least, she could not satisfy her husband with her explanation. He accused her of wasting her time with her friends. As she protested he pushed her again and again. When she was against the livingroom wall he reached up and slapped her across the face. "I didn't know what to do. I didn't understand what the problem was but I was scared."

Tammy remained scared for the next four years. She did what she could to make things calm at home; she always did her school work to the best of her ability and never did anything to draw attention to herself. Coupled with fright was anger. As Tammy continued to see her father's control exerted over her mother she grew bitter. She was angry at her father for the way he mistreated his wife and she was also angry at her mother for not stopping the abuse. "I used to want to stop the shouting and the striking but I was afraid of what would happen to me so I just kept all my feelings in."

During most of the abusive episodes Tammy and her younger sister went to their bedrooms and tried to ignore what was happening. Certainly Tammy knew that when the violence was over there would be no mention made of it. Her mother would say that she sustained the bruises from falling, if any explanation was given. Tammy learned to stop asking why her father was fighting. "It was very confusing, I could see what was going on but I was being told it wasn't really happening. That kinda made me mad, too."

Witnessing the physical abuse of her mother by her father was painful for Tammy but she found far more intolerable the daily verbal abuse heaped on her mother. The insults, the degradation and the threat of further harm terrified Tammy and also angered her. "I'd cry myself to sleep and then I'd be so mad at both of them. I wasn't very old when I told myself that I wouldn't live like that when I grew up and I couldn't wait to grow up."

The day that Tammy, her sister and her mother left the home was one that Tammy remembered well. Tammy's mother came to her school at lunchtime and said that they had to go home and pack some things because they were going to a shelter. "My first thought was, 'it's about time,' recalled Tammy.

Tammy drifted through the stay at the shelter, not really saying much to anyone but rather looking forward to being in a new house. Eventually she and her mother and sister moved to a small house not far from where Tammy's father lived. Tammy adopted the role of protector of her sister, one she maintains today. The

years have passed in relative peace but there have been some difficult times related to custody battles and divorce proceedings. Tammy remains resolute in her decision that she will never live through the experiences her mother suffered. "I've seen what that's like and it's not for me, no way."

**Profile of Respondent #5: Diane, age 14.**

"I used to go to bed with my shoes on so I'd be ready to run when Mom said we had to go." And in the nine years that Diane and her mother lived with violence they had to run many times. Diane's father tended to wait until she was in bed before he began his abusive tirades against Diane's mother. If he thought that Diane did not know what was happening he was very much mistaken. Diane heard the loud arguments, the pleas from her mother and the inevitable hitting.

If she and her mother did not flee during the night Diane would see evidence of the violence the next morning. "Sometimes dishes were broken, there might be a hole in the wall, and always Mom had a cut lip or a black eye." Diane's mother would tend to the morning chores as if nothing untoward had happened. She would cook breakfast for Diane and get her ready for school. Diane remembers feeling sick to her stomach many mornings and there were times when she could not force her breakfast down or she could not keep it down. She would beg her mother to let her stay home because she did not feel well but her mother was unyielding. "She'd tell

me I had to get my schooling, that's what she called it. When I think about it now I think she wanted me out of the house if Dad got up and was still fighting mad."

Diane often wondered why her father was so violent but she was afraid to ask anyone. There was an unspoken rule that the violence was ignored so Diane felt she could not ask her mother. Talking to her father about it was totally out of the question.

Living with fear and uncertainty took a toll on a very young Diane. She began to have trouble passing in school and was often sent for extra help. At about age seven she developed problems which suggested digestive tract problems. Her doctor looked for ulcers. Diane now believes that she knew even then what was really wrong. "I was so full of fear, anger and confusion that my body was getting wrecked. But I couldn't tell anyone. I wasn't stupid but everyone thought I was. I couldn't tell why I wasn't learning."

Periodically, before Diane's mother left her husband for the final time she would take Diane and go to the house of a relative. Generally, they would stay between ten days and two weeks. Diane's father would not come to get them because he said he always knew they would come back. While they were away Diane would pray to God that they would not go home again. When they would return home Diane would feel worse then ever. "Here I was, just getting used to being safe and a little bit happy when Wham, we're right back with Dad. I'd wish I was dead. Yes,

lot of nights I'd go to sleep and tell God that if I couldn't get away from the abuse I might as well die."

As if in answer to prayer Diane and her mother left one day and never did return. Diane's mother told her, sometime later, that she could no longer put up with the humiliation of being told that she'd never leave because there was no where she could go. She finally decided that she had to leave for Diane's sake as well. She was unaware of Diane's talks with God but she knew that the home environment must have been having a negative effect on her daughter. With the help of some relatives Diane and her mother arrived at the shelter one day after school. That was the first step toward a new kind of life for them. Times have been difficult, financially and emotionally. Diane is optimistic, however. Her health improved, her academic standing improved and she is grateful to be alive." Honestly, I'm not sure I'd still be alive if we hadn't gotten away. There was so much pain I would have done something to try to end it."

**Respondent #6: Eddie, 15 years old.**

Eddie cannot remember how many times he saw his father stand in the doorway of their house, leering at Eddie's mother saying, "You can't leave because I say you can't." Eddie's mother would sit at the kitchen table, saying nothing, trying to ignore the taunts. Not only could she not leave, neither could she use the phone without permission.

Living under the destructive control of Eddie's father had been the lot of Eddie, his mother and his brother for many years. It had become commonplace for Eddie's mother to obey orders from her husband because to refuse to do as he said meant only that a potentially explosive situation would become a physically violent episode. Eddie saw his mother being struck across her head and back by his father's hands. "He never gave her a black eye, though. Really, like, he never used to punch her face. Guess he knew someone might see or something," Eddie recalled. Because the family lived in a small, rural town it was difficult not to run into neighbours and acquaintances. In fact, Eddie's home was in the same garden as that of his paternal grandparents. Where she never sought refuge. Her parents-in-law, along with other community members thought that Eddie's father was a fine person. Perhaps, they would say, he got a little too rowdy when he was drinking but otherwise he was great and he did not drink that much anyway.

True, he did not drink much but he did not need to in order to be violent towards his wife. Eddie witnessed many verbal and physical attacks on his mother by his father in which alcohol played no part. Eddie never knew when something might happen. "I'd be walking home from school wondering what would be going on when I got home. I think my steps would get slower and slower the closer I got. I was afraid."

Paralleling the fear was some guilt that he could do nothing to help his mother. Eddie felt quite close to his mother and she talked to him and his younger

brother about the abuse. She would tell them that it was wrong and that she was sorry they saw their father being so violent. One day Eddie's brother asked her why they did not leave. Eddie joined in the conversation. "I asked Mom why we couldn't go somewhere else. I told her that I hated Dad and didn't want to live with him anymore. She started to cry and said where would we go. Really seemed kind of hopeless. Sometimes I'm surprised we left in the end."

What Eddie did not realize was just how determined his mother was to protect her children. When Eddie's father locked the boys and their mother in a room one evening after Eddie's mother said she wanted to go out and visit a friend in hospital, Eddie saw his mother retaliate. It was not unusual for Eddie's mother to be barred in her room but this was the first time he sent the boys in with her. "Like, that made some kind of difference. Mom said we weren't going to put up with him anymore. She sat for a while and then she said she had a plan. Did she ever!" Eddie recalled with a trace of a smile. Eddie's mother, Eddie and his brother got out of the house through the window, fearing all the while that they would be caught. They escaped unharmed and walked to the RCMP station. Eddie's mother only had slippers on her feet. When she arrived at the station she broke down and between sobs explained the situation to an officer and were referred to the shelter.

There have been some difficult times. Eddie's father has tried to break into their new home but he has been unsuccessful, ending up in jail rather than with his ex-wife. Eddie's mother has struggled with a physical illness that threatened to

incapacitate her. It is now in remission and Eddie remains hopeful that his mother will be well for many years, yet. "Yeah, she's had some pretty hard times and deserves to be happy. We all do, I guess."

**Respondent #7: John, 15 years old.**

John's parents were never married and began living together only when John's mother became pregnant, a fact that was repeated many times over the years while John's mother stayed with his father. "It's your fault, all you fault, you had to get yourself knocked up." John recalled his father screaming at his mother as he smacked her across the face. No matter how much John's mother tried to reassure him that she loved him or that his father only said those things because he was angry at her, John grew up feeling sad, afraid and angry. "I was sad first, right, and afraid, but as I got older I got angry. I couldn't help being born; it wasn't my fault if Mom wasn't supposed to get pregnant," John recalled emphatically.

During his early years John felt that he was responsible for the violence he witnessed. If he had not been born maybe his father would not have been so abusive. Over time, however, John reasoned to himself that he was innocent and he developed an anger that he harbours to this day. John feels his anger helped him to survive what he witnessed. "It was easier for me to live mad then to live scared," he noted. "I couldn't help Mom so the best I could do was take my sister and go somewhere when things were bad."



This sense of helplessness had a profound effect on John. He felt that he was not in control of his life at all. He would not bring friends home from school and would not stray far from home because he thought he needed to be around for his sister. His anger sometimes spilled over to affect his relationship with his teachers and his peers. The school called home a couple of times when John was in Grade Two. The teacher was concerned about John's behavior. John's father interpreted his son's misbehavior as a result of having a useless mother. John remembers his mother getting a verbal berating after one of the calls. His father stood in the kitchen grabbing John's mother and screaming curses and insults into her face.

One of the most tense times in John's house was suppertime. Nobody said much but waited for a cue from John's father to speak. During one particular meal John's father said that the Jiggs Dinner was not fit to eat. John's mother said something like she thought it was good. "Then you eat it," replied John's father. He forced her to sit and eat her supper and his too. When she protested that it was too much food he struck her and forced her face right into the dinner plate. John's sister started to cry; her father yelled at her to stop. John took her by the hand and left the room. They went to her bedroom where John turned on her little record player but the music did not drown out the sound of their father's voice. Suddenly there was a loud crash and John knew his father had turned over the supper table with dishes and all on it. He then left the house.

About an hour later John's mother came in the bedroom and told the children they were leaving. An on-call social worker and a police officer arrived to talk to them and tell them there was room at the shelter in St. John's. The officer was going to take them into the city, about an hour's drive away.

After several weeks stay at the shelter John and his mother and sister found an appropriate apartment and moved in, making one major step in rebuilding their lives.

Over the years John has had some time to put his experiences into perspective but he still admits to having anger at his mother for not acting sooner to protect him and his sister. "I know she finally left," he said, "but we saw too much, my sister cried herself to sleep lots of nights. That shouldn't have happened, you know."

## **Section II - Themes Related to Personal Experiences in Witnessing Violence**

Undoubtedly all information shared had significant meaning for the individuals involved. While recognizing that and also recognizing the need to be focused, it was decided to extrapolate from the whole those themes which were evident in three or more of the interview responses. Through a description of each of such themes the researcher has remained faithful to the purpose of describing participant's perceptions of their experiences as child witnesses. Following are six themes which have been identified.

The shared themes can be listed thusly:

1. "There was always violence in the house" - Participants described a sense of always having lived with abuse or the threat of violence. Specific incidents could be recalled vividly while others were less clear. The overriding feeling was one of unease, even when some violent episodes could be recounted.
2. "I just wanted things to be better" - Trying to make everything all right at home became important for some participants. When this was evidently not working the mothers were urged to leave so that they could escape the violence.
3. "I was afraid and I didn't know what to do" - Fear and helplessness characterized many of the experiences of the child witnesses.
4. "I don't understand why it happened" - The need to understand why a man beat his partner was a prevalent theme among all participants.
5. "For a long time I was angry" - While some participants were able to state that they were angry at both parents, all participants voiced their anger towards the father.
6. "He took a lot from me" - The sense of loss was readily acknowledged. Individuals, however, had different ideas about what they had actually lost.

### **Explanation of Themes**

#### **Theme #1: "There was always violence in the house"**

All participants felt that there was constant fighting, arguing, abuse of some kind in their homes. Even when they could not be specific they were able to describe one violent episode leading into the next without much of a pause. Specific abusive incidents merely punctuated the events of an already chaotic household.

- "It seemed like we were all waiting for the next thing to happen."
- "From the time I remember Dad was violent and we didn't leave 'til I was 10."
- "He came in and knocked over the Christmas tree. He was drunk but he knew what he was doing, he went right for it."
- "We knew, if Dad was home, that we wouldn't have any peace at supper time. He'd try to get something going by swearing on Mom's cooking or by saying the house was in a state. He'd start and he wouldn't stop."
- "I don't remember any good times. If there were something bad was sure to be around the corner."

#### **Theme #2: "I just wanted things to be better"**

Participants recalled wanting things to be different and some of them tried to make the violence stop. When it did not cease they would try to get their mothers to

leave. Some of the participants were more passive than were others in their desire to have change and would imagine what it would be like to live in peace.

- "I'd make sure everything was neat and tidy before he came home, you know, and I wouldn't get in the way."
- "I did well in school so he couldn't blame Mom for me being stupid."
- "Sometimes I'd dream that Mom won a lot of money and could afford to take us away with her somewhere away from Dad, somewhere safe."
- "I wanted things to be better but I didn't think they were going to so I thought I better get used to it."

**Theme #3: "I was afraid and I didn't know what to do"**

A variety of emotional responses was expressed by the participants. Elements of fear and helplessness were intertwined and so necessarily must be recorded together. Some participants were fearful of the violence; they were also insecure about what would happen as a result of it.

- "I was afraid to move, that's true. When I'd see him hitting Mom I'd just stand there, not able to move."
- "I might be in my room when the fighting would start. I'd never come out. I knew I couldn't do anything, I was too small."

- "I'd want to help Mom but what could I do? I used to hold on to her after, tell her not to cry. I didn't know what else to do. I was just glad she wasn't dead."
- "I'd be afraid that Mom would leave without me, just run away from all the beatings and leave me with him."

**Theme #4: "I don't understand why it happened"**

The participants wanted to have some explanation as to why their fathers or father figures would behave so violently towards only one person, their mothers. Embedded in the yearning for understanding was a need to ascertain their parents accountability for the violence.

- "I'll always wonder why it happened in our family."
- "It's like a really bad nightmare. Sometimes it's like it never happened, now that we're away from the abuse."
- "It didn't have to be like that. I don't know why I had to live with it."
- "I don't know all about why it happened but I want to understand more 'cause I don't ever want it to happen to me. I mean I don't want to be beat and I don't want my children to watch me getting hurt."

**Theme #5: "For a long time I was angry"**

Anger was expressed at both mothers and fathers but there was more allowance made for the mothers. The mother was seen as more vulnerable and unable to separate herself from the situation.

- "Mom didn't do anything to deserve getting hurt."
- "She'd just take whatever he'd dish out - that made me mad. He'd treat her worse than an old dog and she wouldn't do anything."
- "She shoulda left before she did. She took it for 15 years, now there's no need of that."
- "Even though I think Mom could have left before she did I don't think she caused Dad to hit her. I used to be angry at her for putting up with him but I never thought it was her fault that he beat her."

Fathers were identified as the problem in the household. Participants needed to explain or to understand why their fathers behaved as they did.

- "He was a drunk I guess that's a good part of why he was so mean."
- "He knew what he was doing, he had to. He wasn't an alcoholic but he'd act crazy sometimes. He wasn't insane though; he never hit anyone else but Mom."
- "He's the reason we had to leave our town. He's the reason Mom is scared of her shadow still. He's the reason we had to leave in the

night and go to a shelter and start a whole new life. It's his fault.

He's responsible and I'm still angry about it."

- "He doesn't care about me or my family. If he did he wouldn't have hurt our mother. I don't care about him either. But I'm still mad about it all."

**Theme #6: "He took a lot from me"**

Loss was expressed in many ways; a missed childhood, a loss of friends or family members. For some participants the loss also included missing out on growing up in their place of birth, their hometown.

- "When I think about it it really hurts that I never got to play like other children."
- "I couldn't bring friends home and I couldn't always go to their houses so I didn't have friends."
- "I was used to our house back home, you know. I didn't want to live in an apartment when we came here but that's all Mom could get. My father beat my mother but he got to stay in the house."
- "I've been grown up since I was five years old. I missed out on a lot of fun and playtime and I can't go back. It's sad, really."



### **Summary**

Child witnesses presented a picture of home life in which abusive episodes were woven into the fabric of daily living. The witnessing of the violence, along with the emotional climate, was depicted as an integrated experience and one which had lasted from their first remembrances until they escaped with their mothers. Fear, anger and helplessness characterized their immediate responses to the violence. The sense of loss with respect to place of origin, family, friends and childhood milestones was described as a more long term response. Maintaining a close relationship with the mother was a significant way in which participants tried to cope with their feelings. In attempts to stop the violence participants would actively urge their mothers to leave, try to keep the peace with the abuser or, failing those, would fantasize about a peaceful life.

Participants needed to understand why the violence occurred. Although not a single individual had come to fully understand or resolve the experiences, they were unanimous in their conviction that it ought not to have happened.

### **Section III - Themes Related to Program Intervention**

During the course of this study the researcher sought to gain an understanding, from the perspective of children, of the efficacy of a particular intervention program, with a respect to the following:

- (1) their attitudes and responses to anger,

- (2) their knowledge of support and safety skills, and
- (3) their sense of responsibility both for their parents and for the violence to which they were witnesses.

The common themes, related to these aspects of the intervention program, are discussed in this section.

**Theme #1: "It bothers me when I see someone getting angry."**

All seven participants could recall the group discussions about anger. Four of the young people remembered quite vividly the sequence of activities during the course of the group meetings. Their memories were facilitated because they had saved all of the information sheets distributed during the program and they could refer to these. In addition, the participants had added their own notes, opinions or feelings related to the session topic. The journal allowed them to reflect on the events. This was useful for some of the participants. It became obvious, however, that for most, if not all of the respondents it has been difficult to consider the emotion of anger in the same way as other feelings were regarded.

**Illustrative quotes:**

- (1) "Everything you said in group made sense but it's still hard to remember it when Mom is angry at me or if the teacher is telling someone off."

- (2) "We talked about people having the right to express anger the same way they'd express any other feeling like being sad or happy. But that's not what happens, I don't think. People think they can say anything at all to anyone, if they're angry."
- (3) "I think the meetings helped me to understand that anger is not bad or good. I know that in my head but I get a pain in my stomach whenever I see someone getting angry, even if they're not angry at me. I think I can control myself when I'm angry but I don't know if other people can and that still worries me."
- (4) "When I'm angry at someone, say my friend at school, I don't say anything for a long time. I'm afraid I'll say too much or say something mean, like swear or something. Sometimes I don't say anything, I decide it's not worth it."
- (5) "All that stuff about having the right to say I feel angry and say why was new to me. It took me a long time to try it out. When I was angry I'd lash out at anyone and then I'd feel bad later. That still happens sometimes but I know there is a better way to express myself and that helps me."

Learning appropriate reactions to feelings is one of many lessons children learn as they develop. Society in general does not adhere to the philosophy that anger is merely one feeling among many. Individuals as well as groups of people use their

anger aggressively against what they see as injustice. Destructive methods are for them a justifiable reaction to anger. For children who grow up in non-abusing families it is not easy to reconcile societal attitudes with parental instruction since indeed the attitudes toward anger may be conflicting. For children who know only the soul-destroying experiences of being witness to anger, however, there is no such conflict. For these children there is no positive side to anger. The lesson is learned early in life that if you are angry you may direct your anger, through violent means, toward another person. There is a body of research which supports this view (Alessi & Hearn, 1984; Jaffe et al, 1986). It is remarkable, then, to hear from children who witness violence that as a result of a time limited program of intervention they have been making personal efforts to consider different ways of behaving and reacting to angry feelings. Recognizing that keeping anger in perspective is an ongoing process points to the necessity of continued support for child witnesses.

**Theme #2:** "Talking about feelings doesn't help very much."

Three of the participants, while acknowledging that they remembered some of the group meetings, felt that specific discussions about their attitudes about anger were not significant and certainly held little meaning for their lives at present. These respondents, two males and one female, were quite definite in their opinions. Their thoughts are worthy of note.

"If someone makes me angry I fight back sometimes with my fists and sometimes with words."

"I don't believe the things we talked about. I don't remember all of it but I know you used to say it wasn't O.K. to hit anyone if we were angry - I don't believe that. You have to stand up for yourself."

"The way I look at it is it's easier to fight or strike out if you're mad at something. People don't bother you so much. That's the way I like it."

"Yeah, I liked the group and all, but like, it's not for me, not all of it anyway."

"I can't let anyone know when I'm really angry. I'm afraid to say anything so I keep it to myself."

These are startling, if not totally unexpected statements from young people who have their lives ahead of them. The literature supports the finding that some child witnesses resort to aggressive, delinquent acts while others become withdrawn and anxious. (Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Hughes, Barad, 1983; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson & Zak, 1985). The thoughts expressed by the teens have implications for their behaviour as they grow towards adulthood. How their attitudes are translated into actions will, in part, determine outcomes such as depression, self-destructive behaviour, and antisocial acts leading to conflict with the legal system. The researcher is particularly encouraged by the fact that the participants, while stating that the intervention program was not helpful, were very willing to be a part of the study. It is this writer's belief that their responses were genuine emanating from beliefs sincerely and firmly held, yet they were searching for some new or different

perspectives. They had not completely shut the door on the possibility or probability of a positive change occurring. This willingness, however slight, could be used to great advantage by individual counsellors or group facilitators.

**Theme #3: "I can look after myself."**

While all the participants agreed that they could keep themselves safe and that they knew whom to ask for when they needed help, there were differences in the manner in which they interpreted what it meant to be safe. The following quotations illustrate this point.

"I don't go places by myself very much, right. My friends and I go to the mall together and walk home in a group."

"Ever since we moved here Mom has made sure I don't go anywhere alone. I always have to call her when I leave a friend's house, like, and if I go to a school party or dance I got to call her before I leave and make sure I don't walk home alone."

"I remember how we talked about staying safe, like, but I didn't think I could do very much to help myself. I don't think that now, though. You know, there are some things like not going to strange places alone, making sure you got money to call a taxi if you need one."

"We talked about good touch, bad touch, right? I guess I would tell Mom if anything like that ever happened. It would be hard, though, like, because I'm

not used to talking about personal stuff like that. She'd want to know and I think it's important to talk about it. I felt better after group, I guess partly because we could share things."

"I used to phone the shelter to talk about things. That helped me a lot. I couldn't talk to just anyone, especially not Mom, sometimes."

"I don't depend on anyone to help me. I don't need to talk about things very much."

"I'm not afraid to go anywhere on my own, like, I'm big enough to protect myself now and I look after my sister. See, nobody protected me when I was small until it was too late."

"It'd be hard for me to ask for help if I needed it. I'm not used to asking for it, see, I just stayed out of the way and tried to look after myself. Now I don't think I need anyone you know. I'm not afraid any more."

The differing attitudes are clearly evident in the selected responses. For some participants the knowledge that there was one person in whom to confide was extremely reassuring. Whether the identified contact was a parent or a crisis counsellor or a teacher, the result was the same, a validation of the importance of reaching out for support. Whether the group intervention program was effective in promoting lasting positive attitudes is difficult to ascertain. **The Street Smart Program, Just Say No, and Feeling Yes, Feeling No Program** are just three examples of the many ways that the importance of personal safety has been

highlighted over the past five to seven years. The campaign against drinking and driving has also stressed that personal responsibility for one's safety is essential in today's world. There are posters in schools, bus stops, and on busses. The participants were aware of these initiatives. The learning which occurred during the group process, then, was reinforced. This substantiates the importance of including sessions focusing on safety skills and support in any group intervention for children, especially those who have lived in quite unsafe situations.

It is indeed disconcerting to hear adolescents maintain that they know how to keep themselves safe separate from any help or support that could be afforded them by others. Such attitudes may reflect their reactions to their past experiences and further indicate their resolve to meet the future with cynicism and a sense of futility. However, as stated before, the fact that the respondents were willing to be a part of the research may suggest that there is room to intervene in a very positive way. Information can be imparted to the most seemingly reluctant client and that person will decide when and if it is appropriate to utilize it. As long as participants are willing to be present at group or individual meetings there is hope that positive growth and change will occur. It is the counsellor's responsibility to be knowledgeable, honest and genuine when covering the material.



**Theme #4:** "I used to think it was partly my fault but now I know it wasn't."

Without exception each participant voiced the opinion that he or she felt he or she was responsible for the violence witnessed. Often this was instilled in the children by comments made by the father or the mother. These messages were burned into the minds of the participants. Erasing those memories and learning new lessons has proved difficult.

"When Dad would be hitting Mom, sometimes, like he'd say she couldn't even raise a youngster properly."

"I've heard Mom say that she could have left Dad a lot earlier if she didn't have children. What was I supposed to feel like? She was saying that if she didn't have us she would have been rid of the violence long ago."

"I wanted things to be different and try to make Dad happy but he'd beat Mom anyway. I figured I didn't do enough to keep the peace."

"If us kids didn't do good in school or if we got into any trouble (stepfather) would blame Mom and fight with her. And he'd say it was our fault that he got mad. If only we'd smarten up everything would be fine he'd say."

"It's taken a long time to realize that I wasn't responsible. Nobody made him hurt Mom."

"I still feel like I got to make everyone happy. If Mom is upset about something, say, I try to fix it or cheer her up."

"When we were in meetings and we'd say it wasn't our fault, that used to feel good to me. Nobody ever said that to me before."

"It's been real hard to remember it (that child was not responsible for parent) sometimes. I was used to looking after Mom and I do it now sometimes. I feel like an adult and think Mom is depending on me a lot."

"No, I knew it wasn't my fault. How could it be? I was only a kid. But I had to live with it."

"When Mom was being hurt I really wanted to help. I was so mad at both of them, though. I figured if Dad was not going to change we should leave. But Mom stayed for so long. Before we left I blamed her for staying and later on I blamed her for leaving mostly 'cause we didn't have as much money anymore or a nice house either."

Child witnesses assume adult roles long before they should. Early in life they learn not to expect fairness from life's experiences. One of the most cruel realizations is, as stated earlier, that a carefree childhood is beyond their reach. Instead there is often a complete role reversal whereby the abused mother comes to depend upon the child for emotional support. Naturally children want to please and in trying to do so slip into the responsible adult role. Participants were able to recount times when this occurred both before leaving the abuse and since living free from violence. Established patterns of behaviour are difficult to change and it takes effort on the part of all parties involved to ensure a smoother transition to and

maintenance of new behaviours. Most of the participants were quite clear in their convictions that they were not to blame for the abuse. Likewise they knew that they were not responsible for their parents behavior. However, they acknowledged that at times when their mothers were feeling down they readily tried to help because they felt it was expected of them, that it was their job to give moral and emotional support. Two participants, while confirming that they were not responsible for their parents or for the violence they witnessed, expressed intolerance of their mothers for expecting them to be more mature than their years. With further probing it became apparent that, coupled with the intolerance was a sense of desperation because they did not know what to do to make things better.

#### **Section IV - Recovery Needs Identified by Participants**

A supplemental question which was asked of all participants involved outlining what they thought would be useful to them in dealing with their past experiences of witnessing violence. Specifically, what would have been most helpful when they first arrived at the shelter, what would have been helpful in the five years since leaving the shelter and what would currently assist them in continuing to put the past in perspective.

All participants appreciated the open nature of shelter workers. It was reassuring to hear that other families experienced violence. To be able to voice the fact that you had seen your mother being beaten was comforting. The cloak of

secrecy was no longer necessary. Not all participants wanted to talk to counsellors at the shelter but knowing that they could if they so chose was helpful. Disclosing information or feelings about witnessing violence was seen as difficult but a necessary part of the recovery process.

"I was told never to tell. Mom always made excuses so I did too.

Going to the shelter and finding out that the truth was O.K., well, that was hard to get used to. After a while it got easier to talk."

"I didn't want to talk to anyone but sometimes I found myself offering information. People listened to me so it got easier to say more."

Parallelling the need to talk was a need for acceptance. Participants agreed that, not only did they need acceptance when they first left the abusive situation, they still needed to know that they would be accepted for themselves before sharing information of such a personal nature.

"Even though I've been at the shelter and I've talked to you a lot I'll still go to school and not tell anyone things about me. When we lived with Dad I'd never tell. Sometimes I'd be upset in school but I'd just say I had a bad stomach. First when we moved in I never told any of my teachers why we were here."

Some participants felt that if counsellors were more open and addressed the reality of how some families live it might make a difference.

"Like, for example, we got posters up in our school about AIDS and sexual diseases, see. The nurse has come in talking to us about safe sex and condoms, too. Well, if we had regular talks about violence in the home and kids and women getting hurt, students might feel like they could go to a teacher or guidance counsellor with a problem."

Two participants felt that some people would not take advantage of having someone to talk to because they could not see it making a whole lot of difference.

"Really I think you got to make it on your own after you get a certain age. There's no use talking, just get on with your life."

"I get angry when I think about what my father did to my mother. I get angry about lots of things but I don't think talking about them will help me. I look after myself and that's how I want it. I needed someone to look after me yours ago. I needed my mother then. That's what lots of kids need now, mothers who'll protect them, no matter what."

Other participants noted that they thought it was more of a community concern that children be protected. The Kids Help Line was seen to be a positive service and ought to be expanded to include something like The Kids Help House, a place for children to go and get information or to ask for help.

Finally, one participant stressed the importance of letting children know they are not responsible for their father's behaviour. "They need to hear it again and

again," she said. "Many children want to make their parents happy and think that by being nice, helpful or smart in school, Dad's behaviour will change. It's heartbreaking when they realize he's not going to change. So talk to kids, tell them they deserve a childhood and that the adult problems don't belong to them."

## **Chapter V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

This study was designed to expand the body of knowledge about family violence. More specifically, the study sought to gain an understanding, from the perspective of children, of the efficacy of a particular intervention program, with respect to the following:

- (1) their attitudes and responses to anger,
- (2) their knowledge of support and safety skills, and
- (3) their sense of responsibility for their parents and for the violence to which they were witness.

The researcher wanted to present a description of children's perceptions of their experiences related to the above noted factors. This study also expanded the research into the recovery needs of children. If the program of intervention proved to have positive outcomes, from the perspectives of the participants, it could be used with confidence by guidance counsellors.

Much of the information in this study was gathered as a result of individual interviews the researcher held with teenagers who attended, five years previous, a group program for children who witnessed wife assault. Seven children both male and female, aged nine to twelve, were selected to be a part of the group based on six criteria. Each of the ten sessions lasted two hours, one day per week, over a ten

week period. The interviews were designed to examine the current life situations of the participants. They provided an opportunity for the researcher to uncover new aspects of the issues for child witnesses as perceived by the participants. Each participant was individually interviewed; all questions and responses were audiotaped. The details of the responses were examined in Chapter IV.

### **Discussion of Themes Related to Intervention Program**

After all of the interviews were conducted and analyzed it became apparent that the participants were divided in their perceptions about the positive benefit of the group intervention. Four respondents, three female and one male, had actively worked at promoting change in their behaviors and attitudes. They attributed their desire to have a more positive outlook partially because they were no longer living with abuse and also, in great measure, because they had the opportunity to be involved in the group experience and to talk about their lives. When they found that many other people were living in similar circumstances the isolation was broken and allowed the participants to voice opinions, thoughts and feelings. Since leaving the group these young people have been open to opportunities which have allowed them to reflect on their past and to consider their wishes for the future.

Three participants, two male and one female, questioned of how much use the program really was. Since leaving the abusive situation things have not been significantly different for them except that their mothers are no longer abused. They



do not view the world with a sense of optimism and continue to feel that they have to look after themselves, by themselves, trusting nobody else to help.

It was important that participants be individually profiled so that the reader become somewhat familiar with such children. The collective themes related to the Intervention Program clearly illustrate how seven very special people can fall under two characterizations. The responses to four of the participants when examined together revealed a single style of coping with past and present experiences. The combined responses of the remaining three portrayed a single but different coping style. When considering the outcome of witnessing wife assault it is useful to consider these variations in coping styles as it has implications for intervention and counselling. For the remainder of this section the four participants referred to above will be called the first group of children while the remaining three will be the second group.

A synthesis of the first two themes, "It bothers me when I see someone get angry" and "Talking about feelings doesn't help very much" certainly depict opposite attitudes. On the one hand is a child who acknowledged that he/she reacts to present circumstances because of former events. He/she is seeking to deal with a past where the open expression of emotions was not encouraged and where the destructive aspects of expressed anger were all too evident. The first group of children when given the space to talk, readily availed of the opportunity to discuss how their experiences shaped attitudes. They wanted to help themselves and were willing to take a chance

that others could assist in that process of understanding and acceptance. This is not to say that complete resolution of past difficulties was achieved but they were willing to work through the process to arrive at a better place.

Conversely, the second group of children emerged as those who did not recognize the need for any reconciliation of past experiences. These children were unwilling to give voice to their feelings and rejected the general group discussions about feelings as well as the specific references to anger. These children were standing alone, depending on no one.

The second group of children was further characterized in the third theme. "I can look after myself." Some of the responses were typical of children who were prepared to face the world alone. As young children they did not feel that any adult had kept them safe. As young teens they did not see the need for outside support and chose instead to be self-reliant and independent. This attitude evolved from years of experience in learning how to not talk, trust or feel.

By contrast, other responses are reminiscent of the first group of children described in this section. These children understood that, for them, it was important to have a support system and a close network of people who were friends and advisers in social situations. After having lived in quite an unsafe, chaotic family these children recognized that they needed to learn ways to stay safe or else they could unconsciously gravitate toward the all too familiar danger of abuse.

While all participants were in agreement that the violence witnessed was not their fault and neither were they responsible for the behavior of their parents, there again was a division in how they reacted. The first group of children had worked very hard to put the responsibility for the violence where it belonged. They had moved from blaming either parent and decided instead to accept that what happened was wrong but that they needed to move into adulthood without harbouring resentments. Interestingly, they emphasized the fact that, even in knowing they were innocent, it was still a challenge to remember it in some situations.

The remaining three respondents (the second group) were equally adamant in their conviction that they were not responsible for the violence but the difference in their responses was that they could not indicate that they had moved beyond blaming one or both parents. They were still angry about the past and were not ready to work toward understanding it, much less accepting it.

Given the depiction of the second group of children it is almost contradictory that the three young people who comprise these characteristics agreed to be a part of this research. However, since they willingly agreed to participate, it is this researcher's belief that there is something in each one of them that yearns to move from where they are to get to a place of understanding, acceptance and reconciliation. Certainly it would be a journey fraught with struggle but the outcome well worth the effort.

### **Child Witness to Violence Interview -**

#### **Comparison of Pre and Post Interview Scores - 1990**

The Child Witness to Violence Interview, developed by Jaffe and his associates (1986), is designed to elicit responses in three specific areas, those being the child's attitudes and responses to anger, the child's knowledge and use of safety skills and the child's sense of responsibility for their parents and for the violence. For the purpose of explanation and discussion this researcher broke down the third area into two separate items, responsibility for the violence and responsibility for the parents.

Admittedly a sample size of seven is not regarded as acceptable. There is, however, justification for including the results from 1990 in this research. First it is interesting to see whether there was any significant difference between the scores prior to and after the intervention. To permit easy identification of these differences the table entitled 'Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores on Child Witness to Violence Interview -- 1990 Results' is included here. As well, the statistics can be compared to later observations and perceptions of the participants.

**Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores on Child Witness  
to Violence Interview -- 1990 Results**

Variable	Pre-Test			Post-Test				
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	df	t
Child Interview								
Responses to anger	7	63.2*	2.79	7	77.5	3.02	6	5.61*
Safety skills	7	53.9	1.82	7	69.1	3.74	6	5.77*
Responsibility for violence	7	47.0	1	7	68.3	1	6	3.0
Responsibility for parents	7	50.0	4.2	7	70.0	1.29	6	4.0*

\* scores have been converted to percentages; \*  $p < .01$

As can be seen from the table there was a significant difference in the post-test scores in three of the four areas in question. Judging from the results it is reasonable to assume that the participants adopted new skills and acquired information which helped them to respond more appropriately when the post-intervention interviews were held.

The findings of five years ago are substantiated by the results of the indepth interviews. While the overall results do not allow one to state that all seven benefitted equally, there is convincing evidence that all benefitted. Four of the respondents who in 1990 indicated that the program was useful remained certain that the group experience and the particular intervention used had had positive longstanding personal benefit. The three participants who were currently less

enthusiastic about the benefit of the group experience did, in 1990, suggest that they found many aspects of the intervention useful. They reported a gain in their knowledge and use of safety skills, as well as a positive change on their perceptions of where the responsibility for the violence belonged. A change of this nature in the perceptions brings some questions to the mind of the researcher. If the group members had received consistent community follow-up could the new learning that took place been reinforced and maintained over time? If there had been additional avenues of intervention would the current outcomes be different and, perhaps, more positive?

Certainly there are no answers to these questions. However, if, as a society there is a will to prevent domestic violence in future generations, it is imperative that planned, structured and systematic programs be available to and utilized by counsellors. Since children spend so much time in school it is reasonable to expect school guidance counsellors to deliver such programs on a regular basis.

### **Discussion of Common Themes:**

#### **(Chapter IV, Section II)**

"There was always violence in the house"

The first theme "There was always violence in the house" held some compelling truths. Witnessing violent episodes did not occur separate from other aspects of domestic violence. Although none of the participants identified being direct

victims of physical violence, three stated they had seen siblings being struck by the father. All said they thought they might be physically attacked at any time. Further, participants did not have periods of family cohesiveness sporadically marred by a violent outburst. Rather, it was the regular family picture, illustrated by secret sorrow, restricted friendships, mother's stress and father's control to which the children responded. The literature acknowledges the overlap in the different forms of violence (Scanlon, 1985; Stacey & Shupe, 1983). Some researchers, believing that the effects of witnessing violence may be different from those of experience violence directly argue that studies ought to separate inquiries in family violence accordingly. The impact may be different depending upon the status of an individual as witness or victim (Pagelow, 1984). Other researchers have argued that the essential variables in establishing the impact of exposure to violence are the severity of the violence and the degree of exposure (Emery, 1982; Porter & O'Leary, 1980).

The participants in this study responded not only to events they witnessed but also to the prevailing emotional atmosphere. They were not children who belonged to generally peaceful families that occasionally had troubled times but rather, they were children who lived with violence or the threat of harm most of the time. In the popular vernacular one might say participants were reacting to "the way the family was." Some literature suggests that the manner of family interactions and the emotional climate are the factors which have an impact on the children rather than the actual abuse or witnessing of it. Westra and Martin (1981) noted the similarities

between children who were primarily witnesses and those who were directly abused. Bennett (1989) reported that Sturkie and Falnzer (1987) found little difference in the emotional impact on adolescents who had been directly abused and their non-abused siblings. Other researchers chronicled the similarity of symptoms between child witnesses and children who had been abused by parents (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986; Hodges, 1986).

### **"I just wanted things to be different"**

A variety of emotional responses to violence was expressed. The second theme could be appropriately interpreted as the participants having hope for a better future. If, after a period of time, no change was evident the hope gave way to despair, opening the door to depression, in children. While the literature links a sense of loss with depression it says nothing about that loss including a waning of hope. It is reasonable to expect that when the ingredient which keeps the human soul alive is no longer evident then the result will be the "mutilation of the spirit" (Nesbit, 1991). Depression in child witnesses has not been an area of study in the current literature but there has been some documentation linking depression with children who have been direct victims of abuse (Bennett, p.186). There are striking similarities between child witnesses and child victims of abuse with respect to their adjustment to violence. It would be most useful to understand how depression manifests itself in young children.



A common response described by participants was fear. A number of researchers have identified that pre-school and young children generally say they are afraid when witnessing violence in their homes (Pizzey, 1974; Martin, 1977; Hilberman & Munsen, 1978). Behavioral symptoms in girls are listed by Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, and Zak (1986) as anxiety, withdrawn behaviour and a clinging attachment but there are no descriptions of the nature of fear for these children. This researcher heard adolescents relate how, as younger children, they worried about their mother dying at the hands of her partner. They felt paralyzed with fear practically every time a violent episode was occurring. It is interesting that two participants stated being afraid during the first few weeks after leaving home. They expected that before long violence was going to erupt at the shelter. There was an expectation that the world was as cruel as was the family home. The thoughts of those two participants parallel Bennett's finding that for the adolescents with whom she worked "fear was experienced as a sense of insecurity or lack of safety in relation to the world at large" (p.188).

The participants in this research study were able to clearly delineate what they had lost as a result of being child witnesses. They lost a home, friends, a childhood. The literature has tended to focus on the observable effects of being a child witness. Exposure to marital violence is related to a greater frequency of externalizing (aggressive, delinquent acts) and internalizing (withdrawn, anxious) child behaviour problems, especially in boys (Hughes, Barad, 1983; Porter & O'Leary, 1980;

Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson & Zak, 1985). Based on the perceptions of participants in this study, it would seem crucial to fully consider the feelings of loss as they relate to depression in child witnesses as Bennett (1989) suggests and, in addition, develop a broader understanding of how childhood losses affect adjustment in adolescence and later adulthood, particularly losses experienced by the child witness to domestic violence. An interesting occurrence in this particular study was that not a single participant mentioned the loss of the relationship with a father or father figure.

Important to most of the participants was the need to understand why the abusive incidents happened at all. In order to make sense of their current situations and in an attempt to develop future plans it was important to put the past into some kind of meaningful perspective. This theme has special implications for intervention and counselling. Current programmes of intervention have stressed support, the identification and expression of feelings, problem-solving techniques, knowledge and use of safety skills, and a discussion of who is responsible for the violence either witnessed or experienced (Alessi & Hearn, 1984; Wilson, Cameron, Jaffe & Wolfe, 1989). MacLeod (1987) described programmes for children in shelters that assisted group members to learn about violence and alternate non-violent methods of getting their needs met. Peled and Edelson (1995) expanded on this concept to include a section entitled Assertive Conflict Resolution - I Can Be Strong Without Being Abusive. These are very necessary programme goals. The participants in this study

felt a need to have a bridge between their past and their futures. Even though they had turned away from the abuse they had witnessed it was still critical to have a link to the past. The goal of immediate intervention, then, according to Silvern and Kaersvang (1989) "for children who have witnessed spousal abuse is to prevent long term pathology by providing support and encouragement, to disclose and formulate what they have witnessed, with its personal and affective meaning" (p.423). This kind of yearning for understanding lends credence to the oft-used phrase, "You can't know where you are going until you know where you have been." In order for adolescents to find the freedom to move ahead there must be allowances made by group facilitators and counsellors for participants to dwell on their histories. Programs of intervention must name and support that struggle in order to help group members build the foundation necessary from which to grow and flourish.

### **Discussion of Recovery Needs Identified by Participants**

The need to talk and to disclose their experiences was seen to be important in the recovery process but the manner in which the disclosure happened was even more important. Participants saw the shelter as a generally safe place to talk, although two participants acknowledged that they did not themselves take full advantage of the opportunities to talk when they lived at the shelter. Participants stressed the difficulty they felt in disclosing to school teachers or guidance counsellors. Some of the factors involved the lack of a regular counsellor with whom a student could build a rapport.

Apprehension about being dismissed as overreacting or exaggerating the situation led some participants to hold their silence. With the increased focus on the zero tolerance for domestic abuse it is no longer acceptable for professionals to ignore the possibility of abuse during an assessment. MacLeod (1987) wrote that professionals in many types of services were unable to identify victims of family violence. The medical profession has long been seen to medicalize a victim's problems by providing tranquilizers instead of asking the questions which will elicit the abused person's story (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Failure to consider the possibility of abuse and failure to ask the appropriate questions, in this age of heightened sensitivity to the issue is totally unacceptable.

Some participants noted the need for more information and education about what children can do when they find themselves witness to domestic violence. The idea of safe houses was identified. Inherent in this notion was the desire for children to learn that they are not responsible for the abusive behaviour they have witnessed. In the absence of safe houses and an inadequate supply of phone lines to the Help Line there are some other ways to inform children. Poster campaigns get effective messages across quickly. Children need not necessarily be a part of a group intervention in order to avail of some useful, self-affirming information.

### **Recommendations**

Based on both the literature review which formed the background for this study and the research project itself the following recommendations are justified:

1. The Manual for a Group Program for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence can be used by counsellors as a means to help children learn new ways of behaving so that they are less likely to model parent's behavior.
2. It is extremely important that school counsellors give students the opportunity to safely disclose their experience of being witness to wife assault. It is a subject which must be broached as straightforwardly as would be any concern about academic performance.
3. Coupled with asking the questions and eliciting responses is the responsibility of intervening appropriately. School counsellors need and ought to be provided with programs and intervention strategies to enhance their delivery of service to child witnesses of wife assault.
4. It is preferable to work with child witnesses in a group setting. The child witness is isolated at home and in school. Breaking that isolation and secrecy is an integral part of intervention. The participants in this research identified the open discussion as a major source of reassurance.
5. In addition to the stated goals of the intervention the major goal is to assist in preventing the learning already imparted to the children from being repeated in their future adult relationships. To this end it is necessary to expand the

program to include sessions devoted to how children deal with loss and the importance of working through the grief associated with shattered hopes and unrealized dreams. In society's quest to find a cure for every ailment, an anaesthetic for every pain, we have sometimes forgotten the importance of working through the grief. We have closed our minds to the realization that there is no panacea for some pain or that, until the pain is acknowledged and dealt with, there can be no closure on the past.

6. The aforementioned intervention needs to be used in conjunction with a program for mothers experiencing domestic abuse. A guidance counsellor could facilitate an in-school group with children while a private counsellor could coordinate and facilitate delivery of a group intervention for the mothers in the community.

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**Appendix A**  
**Group Program for Children Who**  
**Witness Domestic Violence**



**MANUAL FOR A GROUP PROGRAM  
FOR CHILDREN EXPOSED TO WIFE ABUSE**

Written and compiled by

Susan Kaye Wilson

Sheila Cameron

Peter Jaffe

David Wolfe

September 1986

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## GROUP PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN EXPOSED TO WIFE ABUSE

The following program was originally designed for use when working with children who have witnessed physical violence between their parents. The use of this manual is intended for professionals working with these children. The manual was designed to address some of the concerns that this special population of children may have to cope with.

The program has been divided into ten sessions, each with their own objectives. Suggestions are provided for activities that may be helpful for the group leaders to obtain these objectives. Homework activities are also suggested to encourage the children to think about some of the issues discussed in their groups. Group leaders may wish to provide the children with a file folder to put homework assignments in.

The groups were originally designed to be run with children aged 8 - 10 and 11 - 13. Some of the activities suggested are more appropriate for one age group or the other. It has been left to the discretion of the group leaders to select the appropriate activities for their own groups.

The group program is not intended to be the only intervention for these children. Children's needs and individual circumstances may vary but, in general, this population will require individual support and specialized staff and programs through shelters for battered women, children's mental health centres, and boards of education.

This manual is only a starting point in developing programs that focus on the special needs of children who witness wife assault. We have leaned heavily on our clinical experience in speaking with battered women and their children as well as other

authors (Garwood, 1985, Sinclair, 1985) who have worked extensively in this area. Many suggestions on structuring groups for children can also be found in the literature related to programs for children struggling with parental separation and divorce.

## **Meeting 1**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## MEETING 1

### TOPIC: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### Objectives

1. Reassurance that the children are not alone - mutuality of experience.
2. Provide a non-threatening environment for the children.
3. Discussion of group goals, limits of the group's confidentiality.
4. Establish group rules.
5. Define family violence.

#### Method

1. Brainstorm for group rules.
2. Ask children for their expectations/wishes about the group - if the children are hesitant at replying, leaders can set up a question box for kids to put in questions of what they want from the group.
3. Paint a mural (neutral topic) to enhance group cohesion.
4. self-disclosure and sharing
  - children divide into groups of 2, and fill out 1 page information sheet on each other (see attached)
  - report to rest of group
5. reinforcement of group rules:
  - choices for discipline - children can be given choices as to what should happen if the

previously agreed upon group rules are not followed

- emphasize flex time: fun time and discussion time are kept separate

6. Define and discuss different types of violence: violence in movies/T.V.; parents hitting each other; parents hitting children; children breaking objects; children hitting siblings, peers, parents; children hurting themselves.

7. Discuss establishing a "mood check" that can be briefly taken at the beginning of each session - this can be accomplished by asking the children how was their day, how are they feeling", events of their week, etc.

- it is important to check for positive and negative feelings

### Homework

1. Have each child take home the attached questionnaire entitled "All about me and my feelings and return them next week.

GROUP 1

ALL ABOUT ME - Younger Group

1. My name is \_\_\_\_\_
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
3. My favourite food is \_\_\_\_\_
4. My favourite dessert is \_\_\_\_\_
5. Two TV shows I like to watch are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. My favourite rock star is \_\_\_\_\_
7. My favourite sport is \_\_\_\_\_
8. My favourite wrestler is \_\_\_\_\_
9. My favourite animal is \_\_\_\_\_
10. My favourite subject at school is \_\_\_\_\_
11. My least favourite subject at school is \_\_\_\_\_

GROUP 1

ME - older group

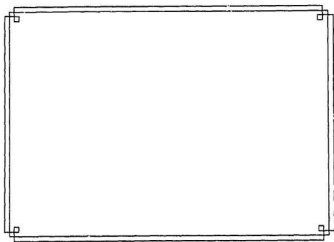
1. My name is \_\_\_\_\_
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old
3. I live \_\_\_\_\_
4. I am in grade \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_
5. I \_\_\_\_\_ school! The best thing about school for me  
is \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ bugs me the most.
6. Outside of school, I like to \_\_\_\_\_
7. My favourite way to spend time is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. One thing I really dislike is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. On TV the 3 shows I most like to watch are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_
10. In music I like \_\_\_\_\_  
My favourite star/video is \_\_\_\_\_
11. My favourite sport is \_\_\_\_\_



12. After I do all these, I like to pig out on my favourite food \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

HOMEWORK - MEETING 1

**All About Me and My Feelings**



**The Author**

**Author** \_\_\_\_\_

**Publisher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Copyright** \_\_\_\_\_

# I feel silly when



# I feel sad when

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# I get scared when

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**I am great  
because**

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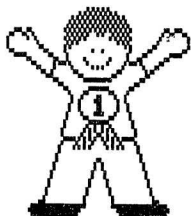
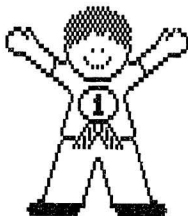
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# I am happy when

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# I get mad when

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**I am a good friend  
when**

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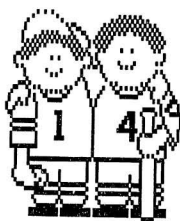
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**I'm glad to be me  
because**

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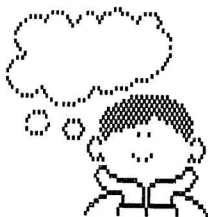
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### RULES OF BRAINSTORMING



1. There should be no evaluation of ideas until after the brainstorming session.



2. Quantity is more important than quality. List as many ideas as possible in a given length of time.



3. Expand on the ideas of others  
If someone else's idea prompts another in mind, share it.



4. Zany ideas are welcome.  
They encourage creativity.



5. Record all ideas.

## MEETING 2

### TOPIC: LABELLING FEELINGS

#### Objectives

1. Give the children tools they can use to express themselves.
2. Help the children become more comfortable with the group process, especially with expressing their feelings/opinions in the group.

#### Method

1. Brainstorm on the different types of feelings that one can have, and definition for "feelings"
  2. Discuss/make a list of different times when you feel happy/sad/mad/afraid (can also include other types of "feelings").
  3. Make a collage on feelings where the children cut pictures out of magazines and put them into the four major feeling areas.
  4. Give the children a styrofoam cup and ask them to use the cup to demonstrate the different feelings (e.g. ripping up cup, stomping on cup, turn cup inside out, etc.)
  5. Have children break into pairs, ask their partners the following questions:
    - "what animal are you most like"
    - "what animal is your mom most like"
    - "what animal is your dad most like"
- children report answers back to the group.

6. One child lies on a large piece of paper, while other children draw their outline.
  - child writes in their own space how they view themselves (i.e. happy, big nose, loud...)
  - this exercise can be completed in one session, or a few children in each session.
7. Have the children rate on a 10 point scale, how angry (happy) they felt in different situations.
8. Have the children take turns selecting one of the attached "feeling" cards, read the card to the group and describe how they would feel in a similar situation.
9. Play game entitled "Thinking, Feeling, Doing Game" - a psychotherapeutic game for children (see reference list)

#### Homework

1. Have the children record their observation of a "conflict" that they have seen on television or in real-life. Get the children to (a) describe the events leading to the conflict; (b) the type of conflict (i.e. verbal, physical); (c) how the conflict was resolved; (d) how the child would have resolved the conflict.

## HOMEWORK - MEETING 2

### SITUATION CARD 1A

It is your birthday and everyone remembers, the class sings happy birthday and they make cards for you. How do you feel? How do you show this feeling?

### SITUATION CARD 1A

You are the new girl in the class  
At recess you wish to join a skipping game. How could you ask?

### SITUATION CARD 1A

You had a lot of problems at school today. Everything seemed to go wrong  
When you get home you ask your mom for a hug. How would a hug help? What could have gone wrong at school?  
What do you do when someone asks you for a hug?

### SITUATION CARD 1B

You are playing ball and your partner keeps winning. How do you feel? What could you do to feel better?

### SITUATION CARD 1B

Mary and Rob are playing Trivial Pursuit. Mary wins the game. Rob gets up and hits Mary and says, "That's not fair. You always win!" Was Rob angry? What did Rob do to Mary? How do you think Mary felt? What do you think Mary should do?

### SITUATION CARD 1B

You and your good friend are playing cards and your friend always wins. This makes you very angry. What could you do to get over your anger and keep your friend? Would it help to play a different game? Would it help to talk? Would it help to take a break?

### SITUATION CARD 1B

Your two best friends leave you out of a game or go to their house to play alone together. How do you feel?

### SITUATION CARD 1B

The class is putting on a play. You wish a part but do not get one. How do you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 2

You try to talk to a new child in the playground at recess. She ignores you but continues to look at you. How would you react? What could her problem? (deaf)

#### SITUATION CARD 2

A new child arrives at school. She is in a wheel chair. How could you help the child feel comfortable in your class?

#### SITUATION CARD 4B

You are watching the Grape Festival Parade with your brothers and sisters. You want the clown to come over and give you some candy. You begin waving to get his attention. Your little brother begins to cry. How do you feel? How does he feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 4B

When you come home from school, your babysitter asks you to clean up your room. When you stop to get a drink she starts yelling at you, calling you names, screaming "You rotten, dumb kids, you never listen to me." How would you feel.?



#### SITUATION CARD 5A

Your aunt, who does not get a chance to visit more than once a year, arrives at your house. She gives you a big hug and tells you how much she has missed you. How do you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 5A

You are building a castle at the block centre. Your friend begins tickling you and you fall over and knock down the castle. How do you feel? What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 5A

You fall outside at recess and skin your knees. The teacher on duty comes over and puts his arm around you. He offers to take you into the office and get you a bandaid. How do you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 5A

Your brother is going away to camp for the summer. You have arguments at times but usually spend a lot of time together. You will miss him and you want to say goodbye to him in a special way. How could you do this?

#### SITUATION CARD 5A

Your younger sister tells you that she has had a bad dream and is very frightened. What can you say to comfort her?

#### SITUATION CARD 5A

Your best friend is moving to another city. You will miss her very much. How will you say good-bye to each other?

#### SITUATION CARD 5B

Your brother challenges you to an arm wrestling contest. He is much bigger than you. You don't want to do it. What should you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 5B

You and your friend are playing ball in the schoolyard. Another child grabs your ball. Your friend punches her. What kind of touch is this? How could you solve the problem without hurting someone?

#### SITUATION CARD 5B

You and your friends are playing tag. A big boy comes over and insists on playing too. He begins pushing your friends around because they don't want to play with him. How do you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 5C

You have developed a bad rash while at camp. The camp's nurse asks you to take off your T-shirt and jeans so she can examine you. How do you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 5C

Your mommy takes you to the Doctor because your tummy hurts. The Doctor asks you to take off your shirt and sit on the table. How does that make you feel?

#### SITUATION CARD 7A

You are at home with a babysitter. She offers to buy you a chocolate bar if you will wash her when she has a bath. How do you feel? What would you do? How does this make you feel?

## Homework - Session Two

### CONFLICT SHEET

1. What was happening before the conflict occurred?
2. Who was involved?
3. What was the conflict about?
4. What exactly happened?
5. How was the conflict resolved or fixed?
6. What would you have done to make the situation better?

### MEETING 3

#### DEALING WITH ANGER

## MEETING 3

### TOPIC: DEALING WITH ANGER

#### Objectives

1. Help the children to understand healthy/unhealthy ways of dealing with anger.
2. Give the children some ideas of how they can cope more effectively with anger.

#### Method

1. Review events/people that have made them angry.
2. Brainstorm on healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with anger.
3. Use puppets for kids to demonstrate ways to cope with anger.
4. Give the children scenerios involving conflicts (for examples, see attached). The scenerios should include situations of conflict with peers, siblings, parents, and other adult figures (e.g. teachers). These scenerios can be used as an opportunity for the children to express their feelings about being involved in similar situations, to get the children to "problem-solve" solutions, and/or to give the children an opportunity to role-play alternative methods of handling conflict.
5. Have the children choose an animal that they are most like when they are angry, describe why they chose the animal they did.
6. Do relaxation exercises with the children (see attached). Help the children be able to identify signs within their own bodies that indicate they are relaxed/tense.

### Homework

1. Give the children the sheet on "Safety Skills" to be completed for next session.

## MEETING 3

### Imagery-Based Relaxation Procedures

(From Koeppen, 1974)

#### General Considerations:

1. Tensing section should last 7-10 seconds.
2. Relaxation section should last 20-30 seconds.
3. Observe the child and make sure he is doing relaxation correctly.
4. Follow the instructions loosely; do them in a relaxed manner; use much inflection in you voice.

#### Forearm

Keep your elbow on your leg (or side of chair) with your palm up (make sure the child is doing this). That's right. Good. Now, pretend you have a whole lemon in your left hand. Now squeeze it hard. Try to squeeze all the juice out. Feel the tightness. Now, relax; drop the lemon...Notice how your muscles feel when you are relaxed. Breathe smoothly and note how the muscles feel. They feel so relaxed--as if the fingers could fall out. Now, take another lemon with your left hand and squeeze it. Squeeze it hard. That's right--real hard! Now, drop the lemon and relax. See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed...Sit quietly in the chair becoming relaxed. (Repeat for the right hand).



### Shoulders and Neck

Now pretend you are a turtle. You're sitting out on a rock by a nice peaceful pond, just relaxing in the warm sun. It feels nice and warm and safe here. Oh-oh! You sense danger. Pull your head into your house. Pull your shoulders up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders. Hold in tight. Tense the muscles. Relax. The danger is past. You can come out in the warm sunshine and once again you can relax and feel the warm sunshine. Watch out now! More danger. Hurry, pull you head back into your house and hold it tight. You have to be closed in tight to protect yourself. OK, you can relax now. Bring your head out and let your shoulder relax. Notice how much better it feels to be relaxed than to be all tight. Breathe smoothly and deeply.

### Jaws

You have a giant jawbreaker bubble gum in your mouth. It's very hard to chew. Bite down on it. Hard! Let your neck muscles help you. Now relax. Just let your jaw hang loose. Notice how good it feels just to let your jaw droop. Sit quietly and breathe smoothly. OK, let's tackle that jawbreaker again now. Bite down. Hard! Try to squeeze it out between your teeth. That's good. Now relax again. Just let your jaw drop off your face. It feels so good just to let go and not have to fight that bubble gum. Sit quietly and breathe smoothly.

### Nose

Here comes a pesky old fly. He has landed on your nose. Try to get him off

without using your hands. That's right, wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles as you can. Scrunch up your nose real hard. Good. Relax. You've chased him away. Now you can relax your nose. Your face feels like you have just washed it, fresh and relaxed. Ooops, here he comes back again. Shoo him off. Wrinkle it real hard. Hold it as tight as you can. OK, relax. He flew away. You can relax your face. Breathe smoothly and relax. Note how fresh and clean your face feels.

### Forehead

Oh-oh! This time that old fly has come back, but this time he's on your forehead. Make lots of wrinkles. Try to catch him between all those wrinkles. Hold it tight now. OK, relax. You can let go. He's gone for good now. You can just relax and let your face go smooth now, no wrinkles anywhere. Oh, no! He's back. Wrinkle up your forehead. Real tight! Hold it! Relax, let all the muscles go, becoming smooth and relaxed. Sit quietly and breathe smoothly. Note how all of the face feels relaxed.

### Stomach

Hey! Here comes a cute baby elephant. But he's not watching where he's going. He doesn't see you lying there in the grass and he's about to step on your stomach. Don't move. You don't have time to get out of the way. Just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your stomach muscles real hard. Hold it. Relax, it's safe now. Let your stomach go soft. Let it be as relaxed as you can. That feels so much better. It feels so relaxed. Oh-oh, he's coming this way again. Get ready. Tighten up your stomach real hard. Make your stomach into a rock. OK, he's moving

away again. You can relax now. Kind of settle down, get comfortable and relax. Notice the difference between the tight stomach and a relaxed one. That's how we want you to feel--nice and loose and relaxed.

### Legs and Feet

Now pretend that you are sitting barefoot in your chair and you see a dime in front of you hanging in a string in the air. Get the dime with your toes. You'll need your legs to help you reach the dime. Now spread your toes apart and get that dime. That's good. Relax, let your feet relax. It feels so good when you are relaxed. Feel your muscles--they are so relaxed. OK, try to get the dime once more. This time you will probably get it. Then it will be yours. Spread your toes hard. Relax, you have the dime. Now relax. Let your feet fall to the floor. Feel your muscles relax. It feels so good to relax.

## Standard (Non-imagery) Relaxation Instructions

(From Jacobsen, 1938)

The procedure for this relaxation procedure should be exactly like the imagery procedure except that the imagery suggestions should be eliminated. Each muscle should be tensed for 7-10 seconds and the time in between tensing should be about 25-30 seconds. Make sure the child is doing the tensing correctly. Also, make sure that the child is sitting fairly still in the chair. If the child is moving too much, explain that he can become relaxed only by sitting fairly still. The phrases listed below to be used in the relaxation part should be only suggestive and not adhered to exactly. Vary what phrases you use. Read the relaxation phrases very slowly, in a soft, relaxing tone of voice. Try to use much inflection in your voice, contrasting the tensing and relaxation segments. Have the child keep his eyes closed as much as possible (during the relaxation).

### Forearm

Put your left (right) forearm on your leg or on the arm of the chair--whatever feels comfortable. In a second, I want you to ball your fist and hold it real tight until I say to stop (show the child what to do).

Now, close your eyes, and ball your fist and hold it real tight (make sure the child is doing it correctly). Hold it--feel the tension. Relax, let the muscles go (make sure the child is relaxing). Keep your eyes closed; sit quietly in the chair becoming relaxed. Just breathe smoothly and deeply becoming relaxed...Focus on how the muscles

feel as they become relaxed. (Repeat the above for left hand and do it twice for the opposite hand. Alter the relaxation phrases using such phrases as: Notice the tingling feelings in the muscles. Note how the muscles become warm and heavy.)

### Neck

Now, switch your attention to the muscles of your neck. When I tell you to, I want you to push up your shoulders and push your chin down against your chest (show the child, if necessary). OK, now close your eyes and tense the muscles (see if the child is doing it right). Hold it, feel the tension. Do it real hard...Relax, let the muscles go, becoming relaxed. Note how the muscles feel as they become relaxed. Breathe smoothly and deeply, sitting quietly in the chair. (Repeat instructions).

### Nose

Now, I want to tense and relax the nose muscles. You have to make a funny face for this one. You have to wriggle up your nose real tight like this (show the child). Now, close your eyes and tense the muscles of the nose. Hold it real tight. Feel how tight it is. Relax. Let the muscles go, becoming relaxed. Breathe smoothly and deeply, sitting quietly in the chair. Focus on how the muscles feel as they relax. (Repeat above).

### Forehead

Like with the nose muscles, I want you to wrinkle up you forehead. Watch me. OK, now close your eyes, and tense the forehead muscles. Hold it real tight. Feel the

tension. Relax, letting the muscles go, becoming relaxed. Focus all your attention on the warm, heavy feeling in the muscles as they become relaxed. Sit quietly in your chair becoming relaxed. (Repeat above).

### Stomach

Now, I want you to focus on your stomach muscles. This will involve pushing in your stomach real tight, almost like you are pushing your bellybutton against your back. OK, tense the muscles, pushing real tight. Hold it real tight. Feel the tension. Relax. Let the muscles go, becoming relaxed. Sit quietly in your chair and focus all your attention on how the muscles are becoming relaxed. Note how the muscles are becoming warm and heavy, more and more relaxed. (Repeat above).

### Legs

Now, we are going to do the leg muscles. Stretch out your leg muscles and push your toes down real hard. Now, tense the muscles. Hold them real tight. Hold it, feel the tension. Relax. Sit quietly in your chair, letting the muscles become more and more relaxed. Allow the muscles to become heavier and warmer, more and more relaxed. Focus all your attention on how the muscles feel as they relax. (Repeat).

### Jaws

Now, I want you to focus your attention on your mouth and jaws. Grit your teeth real hard, bite down. Now, hold it tight. Real hard. Relax. Feel the difference between tensing and relaxing. Breathe smoothly and deeply, relaxed in your chair.

### HOMEWORK - MEETING 3

#### MY SAFETY SHEET

These are people I might go to if I needed help. These people might protect me, listen to me, comfort me, cry with me, laugh with me, or just be with me to make me feel better.

---

AT MY SCHOOL, I COULD

GO TO:

PHONE #:

IN THE COMMUNITY, I COULD

GO TO:

PHONE #:

---

OF MY FRIENDS, I'D GO

TO:

PHONE #:

IN MY FAMILY, I'D GO TO:

PHONE #:

### MEETING 3 SCENERIOS

1. Boys and girls are riding home from school on a bus. A bully named Wayne grabs Paul's mittens and starts tossing them around the bus. After asking for them back and grabbing as they flew past his head, Paul managed to get only one mitten back. The bus arrives at Paul's stop and he must get off with only one mitten. However, this is also the bully Wayne's stop. After the 2 boys get off the bus, Paul goes over and punches Wayne in the eye.

2. Jane and Randy are both in grade 8 but go to different schools. They have been going out for 2 months. One day Jane walks by Randy's school and sees him holding hands with another girl, Rhonda. Jane is angry and hurt. The next day Jane sees Rhonda across the street. With the encouragement of her friends, Jane crosses the street and slaps Rhonda across the face.

3. It's Wednesday evening. Chris has a rough day at school - he did badly on a test and forgot to do homework. Chris wants to have a change to forget about school. Mom asks about the test. Chris doesn't want to talk. Chris wants to watch a special program on TV. Mom says Chris' room is a wreck and its about time it was cleaned up. Chris just wants to get out and goes towards the door. Mom says she's had enough of this kind of behavior and stands in front of the door. Chris says "get off my back" and pushes roughly by Mom.



4. Jamie has just come in from swimming. Mom and Dad are in the kitchen arguing. Dad wants to know how come supper isn't ready. Mom says she's not a servant and Dad could be helping. Dad picks up some food and starts eating. Mom says he could wait so they can eat together as a family. Dad gets really angry and pitches the food at Mom. Mom starts yelling at Dad. He tells her to shut up. Jamie wants them to stop fighting.

## **MEETING 4**

**SAFETY SKILLS, CHILD ABUSE, SEXUAL ABUSE**

## MEETING 4

### TOPIC: SAFETY SKILLS, CHILD ABUSE, SEXUAL ABUSE

#### Objectives

1. Clarification of topic - safety.
2. Help children identify what they are/are not responsible for with respect to (a) mom and dad fighting (b) with peers (c) sexual abuse (d) taking care of themselves.
3. Education/discussion of what kids can do/where they can go/who they can talk to to be safe.

#### Method

1. Define the different kinds of abuse.
2. Show a film on child abuse/sexual abuse.
3. Role-play how to handle different violent situations (peers, parents).
4. Brainstorm on safety skills (these will be dealt with more fully at a later session).
5. Talk about sexual abuse, and the types of feelings that victims might have.
6. Discussion of ways to prevent suicide.
7. Have police officer speak at the group.
8. Arrange for a tour of the local police station, Family and Children's Services to provide potential resources for the children.
9. Using the attached "situation cards", have the children take turns in selecting a card, reading it to the group, and describing what they would do in a similar situation.

### Homework

1. Have the children draw or describe what characteristics they would want in a person they trust.

## MEETING 4 - SITUATION CARDS

### SITUATION CARD 7A

You are on your way home from the store. A man stops in a car and asks you if you want a ride home. He also offers you candy. What would you do?

### SITUATION CARD 7A

You are walking home from school. A teenager stops you. She is crying and asks you to come and help her find her lost puppy. What should you do?

### SITUATION CARD 7C

You are curled up in bed. Your mommy's friend comes up to tuck you in. He wants to crawl into bed with you and pull down your pyjamas. He says mommy says it's OK for him to do this. How do you feel? What would you do?

### SITUATION CARD 7C

A friend of your mother's comes to visit your house. She is friendly - almost too friendly. You don't like it when she pokes you in the ribs and tweaks your nose. What should you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 8

It is Friday night and Sally is being tucked into bed by her mother's friend, Frank. Tonight he puts his hand under the covers and touches her in a private place. Frank says that this was to be their "secret" and warns her not to tell or she'll get into trouble. What would you do if you were Sally?

#### SITUATION CARD 8

Your parents have told your babysitter that she cannot have friends over to your house while she is babysitting. One night after you go to bed, you hear the doorbell, so you get up to answer it. Your babysitter's boyfriend comes in and starts kissing and touching her. Your babysitter offers to give you some money if you keep the secret. You go back to bed and try to decide what to do.

#### SITUATION CARD 8

One night a boy named Ken was home alone with a babysitter. During the evening, Bill the babysitter, asked Ken to touch his private parts. Bill promised to let Ken stay up late if he would keep this a secret. So far Ken has not told anyone about this. What would you have done in Ken's place?

#### SITUATION CARD 8

A family member who is very close to you has been touching you in a way that you feel is not right. You are confused about this. You love this person very much and do not want to do anything to hurt this person. You have been warned not to tell anyone about this "secret". Should you tell someone? Who should you tell?

**SITUATION CARD 9A**

A person you have never met before comes to visit your family. This person pulls you down beside him and forces to sit with him.  
How might you respond?

**SITUATION CARD 9A**

Your uncle, who does not get a chance to visit very often is coming to your house. When he arrives your father is very happy to see him. They hug and say hello.  
What kind of touch is this?

**SITUATION CARD 9B**

You are selling chocolate bars. A lady asks you to come in for a cookie. What should you do?

**SITUATION CARD 9B**

Your neighbour asks you to come in for a glass of lemonade. Should you check with your mother first? Why?

### SITUATION CARD 10

You are alone in the house. A man comes to the door and asks if he can come inside to check the telephone. What would you do?

### SITUATION CARD 10

John is at the movies with a friend. He is watching the film. When the man next to him put his hand on John's thigh, John froze, then said, "\_\_\_\_\_"

### SITUATION CARD 10

A lady who lives in the townhouse next door and who knows your parents, invites you into her home. She tells you that she would like to take your picture. What would you do?

### SITUATION CARD 10

A teenager stops you on the street and asks you to help her look for a lost kitten. What would you do? What would you do if she starts to follow you home in her car?



#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are at a shopping mall with your family. You have to go to the bathroom. Should you go alone?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

An adult dressed in a suit approaches you on the playground. He tells you that he is a substitute teacher and asks you to come to the back of the field to help him find a lost ball. What would you do? Do people who abuse children look unusual?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are walking in the park. You pass a man leaning against a tree. As you walk by, you notice that the man is exposing himself. What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are home with a babysitter and someone you don't know phones and asks for your mother. What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are home with a babysitter. A woman comes to the door, says that her car has broken down, and asks feel to use the phone. What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are playing in the school yard after school. An older woman comes over to you and says, "I'm a friend of your mother's. She is sick. She asked me to pick you up after school". What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

You are walking home from school in a blizzard. You have forgotten your mittens and your hands frozen. A father of one of your friends offers you a ride home. What would you do?

#### SITUATION CARD 10

Uncle Arnold likes to give Sandra little presents and take her to the zoo. They have lots of fun together. Lately though, he has been coaxing Sandra to sit on his lap. Then he puts his hand under her skirt. She feels funny about it and tries to move away, but he keeps holding her tightly. What is Uncle Arnold doing that is wrong? What should Sandra do about Uncle Arnold's next present or invitation?

#### SITUATION CARD 11

Tommy is a five year old boy whose grandfather often touches him in rough and uncomfortable ways. One day Tommy's grandfather was baby-sitting him and he made Tommy take off his clothes even though it was not time for bed or take a bath. Then Tommy's grandfather touched Tommy's private parts.

Tommy told his mother about it but she would not listen. She told him to stop "imagining" things. What should Tommy do now?

#### SITUATION CARD 11

Susan has a neighbour who touches her sometimes when she does not want to be touched. One day during the summer, the lady come over while Susan was swimming. When Susan got out of the pool her neighbour wrapped a towel around her and touched her private parts. Susan felt very uncomfortable.

Because this was not the first time this had happened, she decided to do something about it. What do you think she did?

#### SITUATION CARD 11

A friend of yours is very unhappy.  
When you ask her why, she tells you that it is a "secret". She says no one would understand and that she couldn't talk about it anyway. You are pretty sure that the problem is a serious one and you make up your mind to try help her. 1) Why won't she talk about it? 2) What can you say to her? 3) Who should she tell?

#### SITUATION CARD 12

Your best friend tells you a "secret" about his father who has been hurting him. He shows you some bruises but asks you not to tell any other kids. What do you do?

## MEETING 5

### SOCIAL SUPPORT

## MEETING 5

### TOPIC: SOCIAL SUPPORT

#### Objectives

1. Bring family violence out of the closet.
2. Focus on the children's support systems.
3. Provide information on community resources that are available to help.

#### Method

1. Discuss what supports the children have used for general problems, which ones were the most helpful.
2. Discuss fears that the children may have about telling someone about their problems.
3. Discuss why some families keep family violence a secret.
4. Provide community resources that are available to help if needed.
5. Have the children describe a support system which can be used for suicidal feelings.
6. Draw a picture of themselves in a place they would most like to be.

#### Homework

1. Have the children complete the attached pages entitled "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall..."

## HOMEWORK - MEETING 5

### Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall....

Before you read this page, have a good long look at yourself in the nearest mirror. (I'll bet you never realized just how good-looking you really are!) Here is a little "checklist" for you.

Hair Colour:

Height:

Eye Colour:

Weight:

Who do people say you look like?

---

---

What do you think?

---

---

There's a lot more to you than what you see looking back at you in the mirror.

Your personality - all the qualities that make up you - is most important. This includes things like:

What do you friends like best about you?

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What do you like best about you? (Don't be afraid to brag a little!)

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Are there things about yourself you'd like to change?

---

---

---

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Sometimes, it seems easier to find faults when we look at ourselves. We feel a little embarrassed about telling other people about the good qualities we have. Learning to appreciate the special things about yourself, your family and your friends is an important part of growing up.

A compliment is one of the nicest gifts you can give or receive. Here is one example:

The ball game is in the final inning and you've just been called up to bat. There are two out, your team-mate is on second, and the score is tied....the game depends on you. You can't believe your eyes as the ball sails over the fence and out of the ballpark. You round the bases and score a home-run. Your team-mates mob you and the coach says you are the best hitter he has seen in years - that compliment makes you feel good all over!



## MEETING 6

### SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-CONCEPT

## MEETING 6

### TOPIC: SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-CONCEPT

#### Objectives

1. Emphasize positive aspects of self.
2. Give a boost to the children's confidence.
3. Help the children to explore how other people see them and how they see themselves, especially with respect to their mothers and fathers.

#### Methods

1. Discuss when the children feel good/bad about themselves, what has happened?
2. Working in pairs, have one child tell the second child "what I like about you is...". When the group gets back together, each child tells the group what their partner liked about them.
3. Life Puzzles:
  - each child is given 4 pieces of the same colour construction paper (each child has a different colour)
  - cut each piece of paper into 4 pieces - the shape of jigsaw puzzle pieces
  - child puts 1 piece at each of 4 stations around the room labelled: family, school, peers, group
  - children go to each station and discuss how they and others see them in relation to the topic of the station they are at (i.e. how does child see him/herself in relation to their

family

- write down on their own puzzle piece their perceptions of self, and others' perceptions of self in that relationship

- after they have collected their entire puzzle, talk about the children's overall impression of their self-concept

4. If children's parents had to describe 1 or 2 qualities that they possessed, what would they be...

5. Discuss with the children the extent to which they are the same and different from their parents.

### Homework

1. Give the children the attached scenerio. Ask them to imagine that they are responding to a child their same age and sex and have the children write a one page letter responding to this scenerio.

## HOMEWORK - MEETING 6

Pat is a child the same age that you are. Pat was sleeping one night when great noises were heard coming from the living room. Pat went downstairs and found that Mom and Dad were having an argument. Mom was yelling at Dad because he had come home very late without letting her know where he was. Dad was yelling at Mom because the house was untidy and his dinner wasn't ready. As Pat watched from the staircase, Dad started hitting Mom across the face. Pat was very frightened but wanted to protect Mom. Pat ran down the stairs, ran into the living room and tried to stop Dad from hitting Mom. Dad was very angry that Pat was interfering. Dad pushed Pat away so hard that Pat fell down on the floor. Dad and Mom yelled at Pat to "get lost".

**MEETING 7**

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIOLENCE/PARENT**

## MEETING 7

### TOPIC: RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIOLENCE/PARENTS

#### Objectives

1. Help the children understand who is responsible for the violence in the family, for their parents' behavior (including their use of alcohol).
2. Provide the children with strategies that they can use when their parents are fighting.

#### Method

1. Discussion on who is responsible for the violence in the family, their parents behavior, their parents use of alcohol.
2. Have the children, individually or in the group, write stories relating to responsibility issues. Have these stories read/acted out and videotaped \*(if possible).
3. Artwork - draw representation of the perfect Mom and Dad
  - find similarities in own parents, and build on the positive characteristics.

#### Homework

1. Have the children complete the worksheet containing true/false responses to myths surrounding family violence.

## HOMEWORK FOLLOWING MEETING 7

Following are some statements about family violence. Check off whether you think the statements are TRUE or FALSE. We will be talking about these statements at our next meeting.

1. Men who hit their wives are "crazy".  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
2. Alcohol causes a man to beat his wife.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
3. Only poor women get beaten.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
4. Women do things that make the men angry, therefore they deserve what they get.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
5. Women like to be beaten.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
6. If women really didn't like to be hit, they would tell the men to stop, or they would leave the men.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
7. Men who beat their wives are a danger to the community.  
True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_

## MEETING 8

### UNDERSTANDING FAMILY VIOLENCE



## MEETING 8

### UNDERSTANDING FAMILY VIOLENCE

#### Objectives

1. Debunk myths about wife abuse and sexual abuse.
2. Help the children understand the cycle of violence.
3. Explore issues relating to violence on TV, videos, movies.

#### Methods

1. Have the children identify how their mothers and fathers handle their anger and then how they handle their own anger. Discuss intergenerational transmission of violence.
2. Discuss the children's responses to their homework on the myths of family violence (an excerpt from Understanding Wife Assault by Deborah Sinclair is included to assist the leaders in this discussion).
3. Discuss the myths surrounding child sexual abuse (i.e. it's the kid's fault, wearing certain clothes means that you want to be abused, you only get abused by strangers, etc).
4. Show the children excerpts from movies (on VCR) that depict different forms of family violence. Have the children discuss alternate ways of handling the situation.
5. Discuss the "cycle of violence" (see attached sheets for aids).

### Homework

1. Have the children complete the questionnaires entitled "Growing Up" and "Your Very First Day" with their mother/father.

## HOMEWORK - MEETING 8

### Growing Up....

You've changed and grown in many ways since that special day. Here are some milestones your mom (and dad) will remember. (Ask them).

The day you took your very first step. (Ask your mom what her reaction was).

Your first word(s) - what were they?

For boys - your first trip to the barber for a haircut.

Your first Christmas. (Were there any decorations left on the tree?!)

The day your mom brought your baby sister or brother home from the hospital. (How did you feel about that?)

Your first day of school. (Do you remember your kindergarten teacher?)

Ask your mom and/or dad about the other special occasions they remember.

## Your Very First Day...

There was a lot of excitement on the day you were born! You can ask your mom about her quick trip to the hospital and about how she felt the very first time she got to hold you. She will probably tell you what you looked like too - maybe a wrinkly little face and pudgy cheeks - the most beautiful baby in the nursery! You can also ask her about the day she brought you home from the hospital, your christening day and all the special times you shared in your first year.

What is your full name? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you know what your first name means? \_\_\_\_\_

How much did you weigh when you were born?

What hospital were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

What date is your birthday? \_\_\_\_\_

## MEETING 8

### FAMILY VIOLENCE MYTHS

**MYTH:** Men who assault their wives are mentally ill.

**REALITY:** Wife assault is too widespread to be explained away by mental illness. Most men who assault their wives confine their violence to the privacy of their own home. The abuse is often directed to particular parts of the body that will not visibly bruise; obvious restraint and forethought is necessary to accomplish this. Violent husbands are not likely to attack their bosses when frustrated. If the man was truly mentally ill, he would lack the ability to be selective in his targets and controlled in his administration of abuse.

**MYTH:** Alcohol causes a man to beat his wife.

**REALITY:** While alcohol is often abused by the violent partner, it is not the cause of the violence. Rather, it facilitates the use of physical force by allowing the offender to abdicate responsibility for his behavior. Some men become intoxicated in order to act out their violent wishes.

**MYTH:** Only poor women get beaten.

**REALITY:** No woman ever deserves to be beaten, regardless of the kind of person she is. Provocation is an excuse the offender uses to avoid responsibility for his own behavior. Many people support his view by also examining the victim's behavior or personality for clues as to the cause of the assault. Excuse-making perpetuates the use of violence as an acceptable method of problem-solving and leads the offender to believe he is justified in using force to get his own way.

**MYTH:** Women enjoy the abuse and find it sexually stimulating.

**REALITY:** Women do not find pleasure in abuse, nor is it a sexual turn-on. In fact, women are terrified, horrified and disgusted when their partners turn on them. The "masochist" label (someone who derives pleasure from or

seeks it out) is often used in an irresponsible manner by uninformed people to explain the assaulted women's dilemma. Although women often return to an abusive partner, it is not the violence they are returning to but the hope that it has stopped. Applying this label to assaulted women is demeaning and disrespectful and is one more way to blame the victim.

**MYTH:** If women were really bothered by the assault, they would speak up.

**REALITY:** Assault victims remain silent for valid reasons. They believe they and their loved ones will be at even greater risk if they disclose the abuse. They may believe the abuse is their fault so feel great shame and embarrassment. Female role conditioning, with its emphasis on passivity and compliance, perpetuates a victim position in life. Ironically, those women courageous enough to challenge the silence are often not listened to or believed anyway:

**MYTH:** Men who beat their wives are a danger to the community.

**REALITY:** Wife-beaters seldom attack anyone outside their family. They know they would not likely get away with it. They reserve their rage for their wives, realizing that the consequences will be minor. Perhaps if these men were a greater danger to the community at large, major deterrents would already be in place.

**MYTH:** Assaulted women could leave their abusive partners if they wanted to.

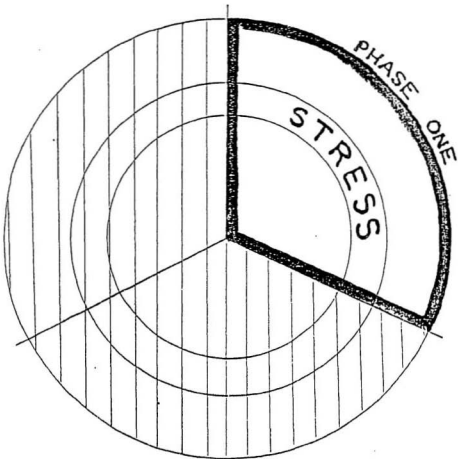
**REALITY:** Women remain in abusive relationships for many reasons. Some are committed to their marriages and desperately want them to be successful. They hope he will change. For others, leaving is not an option because they have no place to go nor money to live on. Poverty is a very real possibility for assaulted women, especially those with children. Fear of being further harmed keeps them imprisoned in a violent relationship. Women often describe their husbands' threats to kill them if they leave.

**MYTH:** Pregnant women are protected from violent attacks.

**REALITY:** In fact, women who are pregnant are more vulnerable to violence. Many women describe the abuse starting when they were first pregnant or the violence became more severe during a pregnancy. Pregnant women have even less access to resources and thus are more dependent on their partners than at non-pregnant times. Husbands take advantage of this dependent phase knowing that their wives will be less able to counter their attacks.

MEETING 8  
CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

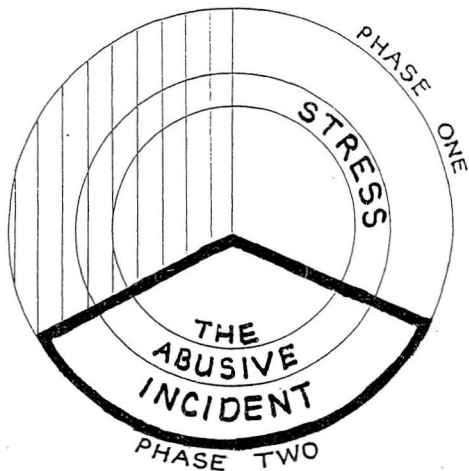
Phase One  
"STRESS"





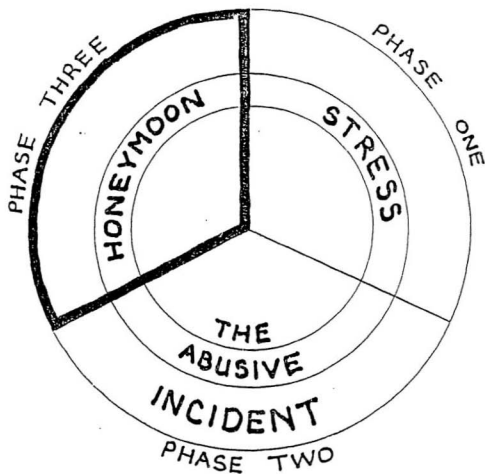
Phase Two

"THE ABUSIVE INCIDENT"

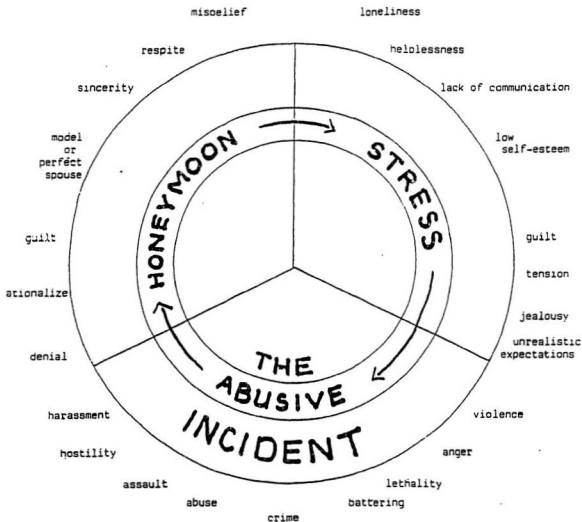


Phase Three

"HONEYMOON"



# The Cycle of Violence



## MEETING 9

### WISHES ABOUT THE FAMILY

## MEETING 9

### TOPIC: WISHES ABOUT THE FAMILY

#### Objectives

1. Start preparing kids for termination of program.
2. Discuss issues relating to family dynamics.
3. Help children cope with the separation from one parent where applicable.

#### Method

1. Discuss what the kids like to do with their moms/dads, and what they would like to do more of.
2. Get the kids to draw pictures of how their family was, is now, and what they would like it to be.
3. Show film on divorce.
4. Discuss whether the children want to invite parent(s) for a part of the last group.  
Plan activities for this e.g. have the children write down things they would like to say to their parent(s) - these will be read anonymously to the parent(s).
5. Discuss issues relating to marital separation including:
  - visits with the non-custodial parent
  - amount of time spent with non-custodial parent
  - non-custodial parents new partner, step-children
  - wanting to get the family back together

- conflict of loyalties between parents
  - being used as a messenger between parents
  - feelings of ambivalence about absent parent (e.g. I love my dad/mom but I hate what he/she has done to the family)
  - how holidays are spent with each parent
  - what some of the advantages are to living with one parent
  - what some of the disadvantages are to living with one parent
6. Introduce topic to be discussed the next week: what the children want/don't want to be discussed with parent(s) in feedback session.

### Homework

1. Have the younger children answer the question "If (the two group leaders) were magic genies and could grant you any three wishes, what would your three wishes be". Have the older children answer the question "If you were in a perfect world, where would (the two group leaders) find you in ten years. What would you be doing?"

## MEETING 10

### REVIEW AND TERMINATION

## MEETING 10

### REVIEW AND TERMINATION

#### Objectives

1. Review of group experiences.
2. Provide a positive termination of the group for the children.
3. Assist the children in their ability to feel some control over themselves/their environment/their relationships.

#### Method

1. Discuss how the children can empower themselves (e.g. reinforce social supports, activities that make them feel good, self-esteem builders).
2. Discuss the fears that they had at the beginning of the group about the group, about themselves, each other and talk about how they feel now.
3. Acknowledge the ongoing difficulties they might have (with custodial parents, non-custodial parents, their anger control, self-esteem) and review skills they have learned that might be helpful in these situations.
4. Do an exercise (pairing off or individually) about what they have learned from and liked about each other.
5. Discuss the possibility of Phase 2 group.
6. Discuss how they have dealt with separation in the past from friends, when they have moved, etc. and encourage them to understand they can always remember the



positive things they have done, new friends they have made even if they are away from them.

## **Appendix B**

### **Child Witness to Violence Questionnaire**

CHILD INTERVIEW - GENERAL FORM

NAME:

DATE:

INTERVIEWER:

LOCATION:

Names of brothers and sisters:

	Sex	Age
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Number of times you have moved since the oldest child in you family was born

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of different schools you have attended \_\_\_\_\_

Who do you live with now?

Mom and Dad	_____
Mom only	_____
Dad only	_____
Other (please specify)	_____

If you only live with one parent, how often do you see your other parent?

No Contact	_____
Daily	_____
Weekly	_____
Monthly	_____
Other (specify)	_____

## ATTITUDES AND RESPONSES TO ANGER

1. What kinds of things make you really mad?
2. What makes children mad at other people in their families?

What might children do when they are mad at other people in their family?

3. Have you ever felt really mad at one of your friends? When? What did you do?
4. When you're really mad at something or someone, do you ever:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u>
a) yell, scream, swear	_____	_____	
b) fight, hit, punch	_____	_____	
c) talk to someone	_____	_____	<u>Y(=1) N(=0)</u>
d) walk away	_____	_____	
e) go to your room	_____	_____	
f) other (specify)	_____	_____	

---

5. If someone your own age teases you, what do you usually do?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Y(=1) N(=0)</u>
Do you also:			
a) ignore them	_____	_____	_____
b) ask them to stop	_____	_____	_____
c) tell someone	_____	_____	_____
			<u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u>
d) threaten them	_____	_____	_____
e) hit them	_____	_____	_____
f) other _____	_____	_____	_____

6. If someone your own age takes something without asking, what do you usually do?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Y(=1) N(=0)</u>
Do you also?			
a) ignore them	_____	_____	_____
b) ask them to stop	_____	_____	_____
c) tell someone	_____	_____	_____
			<u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u>
d) threaten them	_____	_____	_____
e) hit them	_____	_____	_____
f) other _____	_____	_____	_____

7. If someone your own age hits you, what do you usually do?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Y(=1) N(=0)</u>
Do you also:			
a) ignore them	_____	_____	_____
b) ask them to stop	_____	_____	_____

- c) tell someone \_\_\_\_\_
- d) threaten them \_\_\_\_\_ Y(=0) N(=1)
- e) hit them \_\_\_\_\_
- f) other \_\_\_\_\_

8. What can children do if their parents do something that they don't like? \_\_\_\_\_ A(=1) I(=0)
9. If an adult other than a child's parents does something that the child doesn't like, what can the child do? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What do you think is the best way to deal with something when you're really mad? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What are your three favourite TV shows? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Of all characters you have seen on TV, in movies, sports or music, who would you most like to be? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do people in the same family sometimes hit each other? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Y(=0) N(=1)
14. Do strangers often hit each other? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

15. Do you think it's alright for a man to hit a woman? <sup>Yes</sup> /why not. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Elicit from child any conditions in which hitting is acceptable:)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>NO</u>	
a) stays out late	_____	_____	_____
b) house is messy	_____	_____	_____
c) doesn't do as told	_____	_____	_____
d) drinking	_____	_____	_____
e) self-defense	_____	_____	_____
f) other (specify)	_____	_____	

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16. Do you think it's alright for a woman to hit a man? Why/why not? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
(Elicit from child any conditions in which hitting is acceptable).

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
a) stays out late	____	____	____
b) house is messy	____	____	____
c) doesn't do as told	____	____	____
d) drinking	____	____	____
e) self-defense	____	____	____
f) other (specify)	____	____	

17. Do you think it's alright for a parent to hit a child? Why/why not? Y(=0) N(=1)  
(Elicit from child any conditions in which hitting is approved).

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
a) doesn't do as told	____	____	____
b) late coming home	____	____	____
c) trouble at school	____	____	____
d) talks back	____	____	____
e) other (specify)	____	____	



## SAFETY SKILLS

18. What do you think a child should do if their mom and dad are arguing? \_\_\_\_\_ (5 blank)

19. Can children tell when arguing will lead to their dad hitting their mom? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Y(=1) N(=0)

20. Can children tell when arguing will lead to their mom hitting their dad? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Y(=0) N(=1)

21. What should a child do if their dad is hitting their mom when they are in the same room? Y(=1) N(=0)

Should they:	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
a) leave/hide	_____	_____	_____
b) phone someone	_____	_____	_____
c) run out/get someone	_____	_____	_____
d) ask parents to stop	_____	_____	<u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u>
e) act out	_____	_____	_____
f) other (specify)	_____		

22. What should a child do if their dad is hitting their mom when they are in a different room?

Should they:	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Y(=1) N(=0)</u>
a) leave/hide	_____	_____	_____
b) phone someone	_____	_____	_____

- |                        |       |       |       |                    |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| c) run out/get someone | _____ | _____ | _____ |                    |
| d) ask parents to stop | _____ | _____ | _____ | <u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u> |
| e) act out             | _____ | _____ | _____ |                    |
| f) other (specify)     | _____ |       |       |                    |

23. What should a child do if they are hit by their mom or dad? Y(=1) N(=0)

- |                        |            |           |       |                    |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|--------------------|
| Should they:           | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |       |                    |
| a) leave/hide          | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| b) phone someone       | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| c) run out/get someone | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| d) ask parents to stop | _____      | _____     | _____ | <u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u> |
| e) act out             | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| f) other (specify)     | _____      | _____     |       |                    |

24. What should a child do if their mom or dad are hitting their brother or sister? Y(=1) N(=0)

- |                        |            |           |       |                    |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|--------------------|
| Should they:           | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |       |                    |
| a) leave/hide          | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| b) phone someone       | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| c) run out/get someone | _____      | _____     | _____ |                    |
| d) ask parents to stop | _____      | _____     | _____ | <u>Y(=0) N(=1)</u> |

e) act out \_\_\_\_\_

f) other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

25. Do you think a child should ever tell anybody about this? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Y(=1) N(=0)

26. In an emergency (i.e. danger to mom/self) who would you call? \_\_\_\_\_ A(=1) I(=0)

27. Their phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_

28. What would you say? \_\_\_\_\_

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR VIOLENCE

Y(=0) N(=1)

29. What do you think moms and dads fight about?

Might they sometimes fight about the following things?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
a) their children	_____	_____	_____
b) money	_____	_____	
c) jobs	_____	_____	
d) drinking? (mom; dad)	_____	_____	
e) mom or dad seeing someone else	_____	_____	
f) their brothers or sisters	_____	_____	
g) untidy house	_____	_____	
h) other (specify)	_____	_____	

30. If parents fight about their child, how would that child feel?

Y(=0) N(=1)

Would they feel?	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
a) scared	_____	_____	_____
b) sad	_____	_____	_____
c) mad	_____	_____	_____
d) confused	_____	_____	_____
e) other _____	_____	_____	

31. Do you think children can do anything to prevent Y(=0) N(=1)  
their parents from fighting? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If yes, what.

### RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARENTS

32. Can you think of any time where a child can  
help her/his parents?

33. If a parent feels unhappy, do you think Y(=0) N(=1)  
a child can help them to feel better? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Could the child:

Yes

No

a) listen to their problems

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

b) talk to them

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

c) give advice/suggestions

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

d) do extra work around the  
house

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

e) give them a hug

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

f) don't bug them

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

g) other specify

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_

34. Can a child sometimes help a mom when she is  
unhappy? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

35. Can a child sometimes help a dad when he is  
unhappy? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

36. Do parents ever go to their children when they have problems or need advice? Yes ☐ No ☐ Y(=0) N(=1)
- Do you think children are able to help them? Yes ☐ No ☐
37. How old should someone be when they start;
- a) cleaning their own room ☐
  - b) doing dishes ☐
  - c) cooking ☐
  - d) cleaning the house ☐
  - e) babysitting brothers or sisters by themselves ☐
38. Do children sometimes worry about their mom? Yes ☐ No ☐
39. Do children sometimes worry about their dad? When? Yes ☐ No ☐
40. Do you think moms and dads ever ask their children to do something for them that they really are not able to do? Yes ☐ No ☐ When? ☐

**Appendix C**  
**Consent Forms**

**Consent Form - Child**

**Hello:**

My name is Karen Tuck. My co-worker, Barbara Albert, and I are interested in having you as a member of a group for children who have witnessed violence at home. We would like to ask you some questions before the group meetings begin and interview you again once the sessions are all completed. We hope to learn from you your thoughts, feelings and ideas about domestic violence. Also we hope that our ten meetings will help you better understand what you have seen.

You may see a copy of the manual we will be using so that you will know the topics we will cover.

We may want to share this information with other people who work with children who witness violence. We will not use your name or any information that will identify you.

Everything that will be said in the group is confidential. If you want to tell anyone what you have said you may but we expect that you will not say anything about what anyone has else said. Respect every person's right to privacy. This includes not saying who else attends the group.



We would like you to attend all group sessions, but you may drop out at any time if you choose to.

Barbara and I will have to report any information you tell us about child abuse or neglect. Also if you tell us you feel like hurting yourself or someone else we will take action to make sure you are safe.

Thank you for thinking about being a part of the group. If you agree to join please sign below.

I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to join this group and participate in the program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Consent Form - Teen**

**Hello:**

My name is Karen Tuck, a student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, and I am currently involved in writing a Thesis in order to complete a degree of Master of Education. My supervisor is Dr. Norman Garlie. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in this study.

In the Fall of 1990 you took part in a group program for children who witness domestic violence. The purpose of my present research is to gain an understanding, from the perspective of children, of the effectiveness of that particular program.

Your participation will consist of being interviewed by me on two occasions. The first interview will be approximately two hours in length while the second, follow-up interview will be about one hour long. The purpose of the second interview will be to clarify points and to ensure that I have accurately reflected what you have said. During the initial interview I will ask questions about your perceptions of the group experience. I am most interested in determining whether you found that the group program has a positive, longstanding effect. Very specific questions will deal with your:

- (1) attitudes and responses to anger
- (2) knowledge of support and safety skills and

(3) feelings of responsibility for his/her parents and for the violence he/she witnessed.

Although the interviews will be audiotaped I will be the only person to listen to the tapes. The tapes will be erased upon the completion of my study.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential. My Thesis will be presented to examiners at the university but at no time will you be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time or you may refrain from answering any question you choose to omit.

Thank you for considering my request. If you agree to participate in this study please sign below. One copy of this consent is for you to keep. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean (Acting), Research and Development at 737-8693.

I voluntarily agree to take part in a study on my perceptions of the effectiveness of a group program for children who witness domestic violence. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. All information is strictly confidential and I will not be identified.

---

Name (print)

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Witness

---

Date

**Consent Form - Mother of Teen**

**Dear Parent:**

My name is Karen Tuck, a student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, and I am currently involved in writing a Thesis in order to complete a degree of Master of Education. My supervisor is Dr. Norman Garlie. I am requesting your permission for your child to participate in this study.

In the Fall of 1990 your child took part in a group program for children who witness domestic violence. The purpose of my present research is to gain an understanding, from the perspective of children, of the effectiveness of that particular program.

Your child's participation will consist of being interviewed by me on two occasions. The first interview will be approximately two hours in length while the second, follow-up interview will be about one hour long. The purpose of the second interview will be to clarify points and to ensure that I have accurately reflected what your child has said. During the initial interview I will ask questions about your child's perceptions of the group experience. I am most interested in determining whether your child found that the group program has a positive, longstanding effect. Very specific questions will deal with your child's:

- (1) attitudes and responses to anger
- (2) knowledge of support and safety skills and

(3) feelings of responsibility for his/her parents and for the violence he/she witnessed.

Although the interviews will be audiotaped I will be the only person to listen to the tapes. The tapes will be erased upon the completion of my study.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential. My Thesis will be presented to examiners at the university but at no time will your child be identified.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your child at any time. Your child may also withdraw at anytime or decline to answer any question he or she chooses to omit. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request.

Thank you for considering my request. If you are in agreement with having your child participate in this study please sign below. One copy of this consent is for you to keep. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study please contact Dr. Stephen Norris, Associate Dean (Acting), Research and Development at 737-8693.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Tuck

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (parent) hereby give permission for my child  
\_\_\_\_\_ to take part in a study on his/her perceptions of the  
effectiveness of a group program for children who witness domestic violence. I  
understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that my child and/or I can  
withdraw permission at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no  
individual will be identified.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

**Consent Form - Mother**

Hello:

My name is Karen Tuck. My co-worker, Barbara Albert, and I are interested in having your child \_\_\_\_\_ become a member of a group for children who witness domestic violence. We will be interviewing the children before the ten week program and then will be interviewing them after the sessions are over. We want to know about the children's thoughts, feelings and ideas about what it has been like to live in a house where they have seen their mother being hurt. There will be a total of seven group participants, four female and three male. We hope that we will learn more about your child's perceptions and also that the group meetings will help \_\_\_\_\_ understand more of his/her situation.

You will be notified should we want to publish the results. Your child's name will not be used, neither will there be any identifying information printed. If your child wants to tell you what s/he said during a group meeting that is fine. We will not share that information. All information is confidential except where it relates to child abuse or neglect, thoughts of suicide or homicide. If your child discloses incidents of abuse or neglect of children we will have to refer it on to the appropriate authorities. Similarly, if your child tells us s/he is feeling like hurting her/himself or someone else we will take action to ensure his/her safety.



You may see the manual which we will follow if you so choose.

If necessary we will pick up your child from home each week at around 3:30 p.m. and return him/her home at approximately 6:30 p.m.

You have been identified because of your six-week stay at Iris Kirby House and your subsequent decision to move out on your own with your children.

I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D**  
**Group Participant Evaluation Form**

### GROUP PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

1. Did you enjoy the group?

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
very	most of	some of	a little	not at all
much	the time	the time		

2. What did you like best?

meeting other children	_____
activities	_____
leaders	_____
talking to others	_____
other	_____

3. What did you not like very much?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Did you make new friends?

Yes	_____
No	_____
How many?	_____

5. Which topics were most helpful?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Will you remember and think about this group anymore now that our meetings are over?

7. Do you think you will use any of the things you have learned?

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
often		sometimes		never

8. What were 3 things you learned that will be helpful to you?

---

---

---

9. Do you have anything else you would like to say about the group?

### **Summary of Group Participant Evaluation Forms**

At the end of the ten week period the participants were asked to complete an evaluation devised by the co-facilitators of the group. It was completely optional and anonymous.

All participants indicated that they enjoyed the group, responding with a 1, 2, or 3. The favorite sessions were the ones centered around group activities such as the relaxation techniques, the Life Puzzle and the situation cards. Meeting other children was the second favorite aspect of most of the group. Interestingly, one child noted that the weekly fruit, muffin and milk snack was one of the best parts of the meetings.

There were three children who did not like the sessions which focused on feelings. They indicated that they found it difficult and somewhat embarrassing; one of those three participants, however, said that it was helpful, even so.

All participants said they had made at least one new friend and would stay in touch when the group was finished. Two participants did not answer the sixth question but the remaining five participants said they would remember the group and think about it sometimes. Further, all members noted that they would use some of the information and skills they had learned, citing 1, 2, or 3 as their answers.

Topics which were highlighted as being most helpful included the discussions about self-esteem, social support, and responsibility for the violence. Finally, three participants indicated that they felt good about having a list of emergency numbers in

their pockets. Also, knowing they could call the local shelter was reassuring. One child said that being able to call other group members would be helpful. Two respondents emphasized that remembering they were not responsible for the abuse they had witnessed would be useful to them.

**Appendix E**  
**Guideline Questions**

### **Guideline Questions**

1. You have had some time to think about the group with which you were involved. Can you tell me three things you remember about that experience?
2. What kind of groups have you participated in since 1990?
3. Have you been involved in any individual counselling since 1990?
4. Tell me about your family. Who lives with you? How do you get along with everyone else in your house?
5. Tell me about your friends.
6. Let's talk about anger for awhile. What kinds of things make you angry?
7. What happens when you get angry? What do you do?
8. Do you think it is appropriate for anyone to get angry?
9. What do you do when you are near someone who gets angry?
10. Do you remember any of the discussions the group had about anger?
11. Who do you talk to when you need advice or guidance or when you need someone to lean on?
12. Do you think it is important for people to have someone to talk to?
13. What do you do when you are in a place where you feel unsafe?
14. Did you learn anything in the group about how to keep yourself safe? What did you learn? Have you used that knowledge within the last five years?
15. Tell me about your relationship with your mother.



**Appendix F**  
**Supplementary Questions**

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

1. Please relate some of your experiences at home before you came to Iris Kirby House.
2. Do you think your early experiences had an impact on your social relationships?
3. Has your education, your years in school, been a helpful experience for you?
4. Would you say you are successful in your school courses?
5. In order to help you deal with the experiences you witnessed what would have been most helpful to you when you went to the shelter?
6. What do you need right now to help you put your experiences in perspective, to help you continue to deal with them?







